

Essay on the european union and its relations with turkey

[Parts of the World](#), [European Union](#)



Introduction

The location of Turkey is very unique. It is placed at the convergence of two continents. There are very few countries in the world falling under two different continents and Turkey is one of them. Turkey's location in between Asia and Europe gives it a very strategic geopolitical advantage. From the time Turkey got its independence in 1923, it has been a great ally to the Western European Countries. On the other hand, European Union was not always together. In the early part of the century most of the Western European countries were at war with each other. After World War II those countries perceived the value of political and economic union in the region. As a result, Council of Europe was formed immediately after the World War II in 1949 to promote cooperation among the European countries and in the 90's European Union was formed with 27 countries to create a united Europe. Turkey was one of the very first supporters and members of European council, but still Turkey was not included in European Union when it was formed. The relationship between Turkey and EU has been bitter-sweet over the decades. This essay will discuss how over the years the political and economic equation between EU and Turkey has changed due to various reasons, the future of EU-Turkey relation and its impact on other countries in the world.

Early Relationship

Turkey first became a member of Council of Europe in 1949 and thereafter a member of NATO in 1952. With the desire to join the economic communion of Western Europe Turkey applied for associate membership in 1959 to

European Economic Community (EEC). In 1963 EEC signed an agreement with Turkey, popularly known as the Ankara Agreement according to which the request of Turkey to join the economic bloc of Western Europe was evaluated and it was decided that Turkey needs to pass through three phases to become eligible for membership. In the first phase, also known as the preparatory phase, Turkey and EU prepared the basic norms of the agreement and they created a draft plan for the transitional phase in 1963. Also an obligation for both the parties in the next phase was determined in this phase only. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, 2012)

In second or transitional phase a Customs Union or a trade bloc was created. With this Customs Union and the additional obligation of Turkey and EU as determined in the Ankara agreement, an Additional Protocol that was signed in 1970 was put in effect from 1973. In this additional protocol, timeline for abolition of custom duties, taxes and tariffs on traded goods between Turkey and EU was also decided. The agreement could not gain momentum in the next 15 years and finally in 1987 Turkey formally submitted an application for granting Turkey membership in the European Community. European Union immediately acknowledged in 1989 that it fully supported the Ankara Agreement and it was willing to grant Turkey membership in European Union but it would not be a process in haste and might take long time. In the statement released by EU in 1989 it was mentioned that Turkey needed to improve its relationship with existing EU members like Cyprus and Greece. It also pointed out that Turkey's poor relationship with its neighbor Greece and continuous conflict with Cyprus would definitely deter the process of Turkey's accession into EU. Turkey's prospects received a jolt when

European Union started talks with other Eastern European countries for expanding the union. The relationship between Turkey and EU hit rock bottom in 1997 but in 1999 EU in its Helsinki European Council meeting declared that Turkey was at equal footing with all other prospective candidates for joining European Union. This again started the negotiation talk between two parties based on the agreements decided in Ankara Agreement. EU officially gave Turkey “ Candidate Status” in 1999.(“ Turkey-EU Relations”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey)

Early 2000s

Turkey -EU relations took a further positive step when in Copenhagen Council it was decided that Turkey would be considered for a full membership status and EU would start negotiations with Turkey without delay if Turkey fulfilled some political criterion. In 2004 during Helsinki meeting it was decided that Turkey fulfilled the entire political criterion and further discussion can be started from October 2005. However, during 2004 Cyprus was granted membership in EU which soured the relationship between EU and Turkey. In fact the urgency to join EU among the Turkish people decreased to a great degree. (Council of EU, Copenhagen)

Resistance from EU members

During the Helsinki summit the initial objections came from Austria and Germany. Their point of view was to create a privileged partnership with Turkey rather than inducting it as a candidate in EU. However, after a prolonged discussion with other member nations of EU Germany finally conceded to the idea of Turkey membership. Austria remained adamant

against the idea of Turkey joining EU as a member nevertheless.

During 2004 -2005 the relationship between Cyprus and Turkey worsened and which caused a huge problem for Turkey in the EU council. Cyprus as an existing member in EU opposed Turkish accession propositions. In 2007 France also opposed the idea. Because of so much resistance from other member countries the process which started with a promise finally stalled after 2005. All the discussions on 33 Acquis Communautaire or 33 chapters that required negotiation between EU and Turkey and then a unanimous agreement by all its existing members before granting member status to Turkey stopped. (Mark Beundarman, 2007)

Positive Agenda

Between the years 2004 and 2006 only one chapter on Science and Research opened for discussion between EU and Turkey but that too closed in 2006. None of the other chapters were opened during this period. Cyprus forced EU to close 8 chapters in 2006. The tension between Turkey and Cyprus remained same over the next two years and no progress was made in the negotiations and discussions. Finally in 2007 EU opened some agenda between EU and Turkey to focus on common interests which was known as 'Positive Agenda'. The intention was to keep the accession talks and process alive. The agenda talked about many economic and political reforms in many areas. Starting from visa, fight against terrorism, freedom of expression, minority rights, judicial system etc. were considered for negotiation. The idea behind 'Positive Agenda' was to create a congenial environment for talks and create an instrument to accelerate the support for opening the remaining 32

chapters. 'Positive Agenda' helped open 8 different chapters between 2007 and 2012. Immediately after launching 'Positive Agenda' in 2012, Turkey froze its relationship with EU for its continuous friction with Cyprus. In February of 2013 France indicated that it would be willing to support Turkey in reopening two chapters which it opposed previously in 2007. .(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, 2012)

European Union's Internal Dilemma

EU and Turkey negotiation process is only a straw in the big chasm within EU. Within EU there is a big divide between members. Some of the members see this expansion plan of European Union as economic expansion. They predominantly look at the free trade and movement of goods related issues. This group is pro-expansion. The second group sees European Union predominantly as a political coalition and powerhouse. These members are skeptical about incorporating Turkey in the Union. Supporters of Turkey in EU like Sweden argue that Turkey is one of the biggest powerhouses of the region. If inducted it will be the second largest military force in EU and its unique geographical position will give EU countries an easy access to Central Asia, Middle East and Caspian sea region. This will also ensure more stability on the eastern frontiers of Europe. United Kingdom is also a big supporter of Turkey joining EU. If Turkey joins EU today it will have the second largest representation in terms of population.

But there is one problem with the location of Turkey. Only 3% of the Turkish territory is in Europe and rest of it is in Asia. Some of the countries show this as a reason for not accepting Turkey into EU. However, Cyprus which was

inducted in EU in 2004 is in Asia and this dismisses the idea of rejecting Turkey on the basis of geographical position.

Some of the big members including United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden are not opposed to the idea of Turkey joining European Union. Even in recent years France also explicitly said it would be willing to reconsider its stance in favor of Turkey. However, some of the smaller countries in the European Union are strongly opposed to Turkey being absorbed into EU. Austria has a century long problem with Turkey. Ottoman Empires attacked Austria time and again causing an age-old rivalry between the two countries.

Cyprus Problem and Tension between EU and Turkey

Cyprus is a small island nation in east Mediterranean. Almost 80% of its population is of Greek origin and 18% of Turkish origin. The island nation was always a problem for Turkey and Greece. Almost 25% of the island that is now ruled by the people of Turkish origin is called Turkish Cypriot or Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In last few decades many peace talks were tried by United Nations, United States of America and United Kingdom to converge the southern part of Cyprus (Greece dominated portion) with the Northern Part (Turkish dominated area). UN Secretary General Kofi Annan made several efforts to bring both the parts under one single umbrella. All of those negotiation talks failed. Part of Cyprus which is ruled by the people of Greek origin is now a part of European Union and the northern part of Cyprus is now in the 'Observer Region' status. The tension between Greece, Cyprus and Turkey for the territorial gain of Cyprus has soured the relationship between them. Greece and Cyprus as existing members of the EU are now

creating huge opposition to the idea of Turkey joining European union. This situation is not going to change in near future as it seems.

Internal Reforms Demanded by European Union

European Union pointed out three issues in the Turkish judiciary before it could consider Turkey for membership. The first was against a law which allows imprisonment for up to 2 years if anyone insults Turkey. EU says that it hinders one's freedom of expression. Secondly, EU says that although women rights are in place in Turkey, those rights are still not properly implemented. Thirdly, Turkey refuses to give its citizens the right to refuse joining military service. As per the United Nations human rights documentation of 1998 any person can refuse to perform military duty.

Benefits to Turkey and European Union

There are many perceived benefits by Turkey if it gets inducted into EU. The first and foremost is the accelerated economic development of Turkey. Economic development will be augmented by Turkish businesses getting a larger market access in the Western European countries. Additionally, it will attract a lot of outside investment to Turkey. As Turkey is such a big economy, it is likely to attract a lot of foreign investment. This influx of money will strengthen the economy and accelerate growth. Secondly, during struggling period Turkey can expect economic incentive packages from EU just as EU granted to Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Spain. This will reduce the fear of any economic recession in Turkish market. Thirdly, as a member of the EU union Turkish people will be able to freely move and migrate around different countries in Europe. They will be able to settle in other

places, go for studies or can move around in search for work. This will improve the standard of living for the Turkish people in and outside Turkey. Fourthly, with Turkish people spreading all across Europe will ease the tension between Islam and other religions and acceptance of Islam will increase across Europe. Finally, the large population of Turkey will give it a huge representation in the EU parliament. It is predicted that by 2020 Turkey will be the most populous nation among the European Council members. It will then have huge influence over any EU decision.

EU will have certain advantages if Turkey is inducted in the union. Booming and fast growing Turkish economy will definitely help the dwindling EU economy recover faster. Huge Turkish market will open a plethora of opportunities for EU businesses. Turkey has a very good relationship with its Central Asian and Middle East neighbors which will help European Countries to create a more peaceful and congenial business environment with them with the help of Turkey.

Conclusion

EU-Turkish relationship time and again showed promise only to fall apart soon. Both Turkey and EU wants to take it forward but both are bound by certain political and economic obligations. EU is obligated to listen to its existing members like Cyprus, Austria and Greece who are in direct opposition of accession of Turkey in EU. On the other hand, for Turkey keeping the Northern Cyprus territory is more of a prestige issue than joining EU. Last decade was promising for both EU and Turkey but it never gained critical momentum. Now after decades of failed negotiations even most of

the Turkish people do not want to join EU any more. The relationship remains strained between the two and the future uncertain. Only coming days will tell how it shapes up.

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