



European Commission Recommends Accession Negotiations with Turkey, but with Certain Conditions

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Theme: This report analyses the European Commission's landmark report on Turkey (http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2004/pdf/rr_tr_2004_en.pdf) and its momentous recommendation to the next European Council meeting on December 17 in Brussels to start accession negotiations, 41 years after the country became an associate member of the then EEC. The Commission also issued a detailed impact study (http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_2004/pdf/issues_paper_en.pdf). Both the previous Popular Party government (1996-2004) and the current Socialist administration have been among the most active supporters of Turkey's membership.

Summary: The Commission's sixth report on Turkey was in theory a technical exercise, a ticking of boxes about the country's progress in meeting the Copenhagen political and economic criteria for starting negotiations. In practice, the debate over Turkey is much more profound because of its size (70 million people), poverty (its 2003 per capita GDP was 28.5% of the EU-25 average in purchasing power terms) and the fact that it is an overwhelmingly Muslim country. No other prospective EU member has inflamed such passions in favour and against its accession.

The Commission gave no date by when Turkey would be a full EU member (the earliest date is still believed to be 2015) and it said negotiations could not begin until certain key legislation in preparation enters into force (for example, the new penal code). Many EU governments are pressing for negotiations to begin early next year. Furthermore, the Commission introduces a brake clause for the first time and warns that it would recommend the suspension of negotiations in case of a serious and persistent breach of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The Turkish government generally welcomed the report.

Analysis: At its meeting in Copenhagen in December 2002, the European Council stated that 'if the European Council in December 2004, on the basis of a report and a recommendation from the Commission, decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, the European Union will open accession negotiations with Turkey without delay'. This was reaffirmed by the European Council in Brussels in June 2004. The decision by the Commission follows this request, but, in spirit if not the letter, Turkey's accession has been put into a different category to that of countries that have joined the EU so far.

Given the undeniable progress that Turkey has made, it would have been very difficult for the Commission to have further delayed the start of accession negotiations without seriously denting its credibility, particularly in the Muslim world, and triggering a backlash in Turkey for 'double standards'. A rejection would have confirmed the saying of Mustafa

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Kemal Atatürk –who founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923 on the ruins of the Ottoman empire– that ‘The West has always been prejudiced against the Turks, but we Turks have always consistently moved towards the West’. Once Turkey became a candidate in 1999, because the country was considered to have the basic features of a democratic system while at the same time displaying serious shortcomings in human rights and protection of minorities, the EU was boxed into a corner.

Although the Helsinki European Council decided that ‘Turkey is a candidate country destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate states’, it is clear that the same criteria and methods used for the 25 members of the EU are not being applied to Turkey. The Commission has weaved into its recommendation certain conditions that make Turkey a special case –which indeed it is–. It should be noted, however, that the hardening of accession conditions also applies to Croatia, and the Commission has introduced a safeguard clause, because of continued high levels of corruption, which could put back the entry of Romania from the expected 2007 to 2008. But these small countries do not raise the same concerns as the Turkish giant.

There are two main reasons for the special approach to Turkey. First, the Commission’s stance, which implies that Turkey’s full membership is by no means a foregone conclusion, is designed to placate public opinion in those countries most opposed to Turkey’s EU entry –France, Austria, Scandinavia and some of the 10 new entrants–. The Commission’s tough stance on negotiations also ensured virtually unanimous backing among the 30 commissioners.

There had earlier been a split between sceptics about Turkey’s entry into the EU and those who wanted a more positive endorsement. Frits Bolkestein, the outgoing single market commissioner, said in September that Europe would be ‘Islamised’ because of demographic and migration changes. He added that if this occurred, ‘the liberation of Vienna (from the Turks) in 1683 would have been in vain’. Franz Fischler, the outgoing agricultural commissioner, said there were ‘doubts as to Turkey’s long-term secular and democratic credentials’ and ‘there could... be a fundamentalist backlash’. Because of such a risk, he had called for a ‘plan B, addressing the best ways to help Turkey keep up the reform momentum... [such as] a special partnership status’.

France is among the EU nations most hostile to enlargement and the last 20 opinion polls have shown about 60% of people consistently opposing Turkish membership. French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin asked in September whether Europe really wanted ‘the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism’. President Jacques Chirac, who is in favour of Turkey’s EU entry, has promised, with the backing of José Manuel Durão Barroso, the incoming Commission president, to hold a referendum at some point on Turkey’s entry (as France did in 1972 for British EU membership).

The Commission’s report ignores the potential problems posed by Turkey’s cultural and religious heritage and monitors the progress in the same issues as it did for other candidate countries. On the contrary, it states ‘Turkey would be an important model of a country with a majority Muslim population adhering to such fundamental principles as liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law’. After all, Europe is the home of secularism.

Secondly, the stringent conditions will maintain the pressure for Turkey to reform. In the Commission’s own words Turkey has ‘substantially progressed in its political reform process’ and without some kind of sword of Damocles over its head it could lose momentum. Just how far Turkey has come can be judged from the fact that just 10 years ago, during the conflict between the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) and the security forces (with a death toll of around 30,000), ‘torture was pandemic, with deaths in custody running

at around one a week, and extrajudicial executions, political killings and “disappearances” occurring almost daily,’ according to Human Rights Watch.

Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development (AKP), the country’s first government fully controlled by a party with a strong Islamist tradition in a nation with an avowedly secular constitution (of which the military is the self-professed guardian), may object to being treated like no other candidate. This is a small price, however, to pay for the historic decision and one for which the reformist prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, can take most of the credit. How ironic that Atatürk’s dream of Turkey becoming a fully fledged European country should be achieved by a devout Muslim democrat whose wife is barred from the presidential palace in Ankara, because she insists on wearing a headscarf! But she has been to the White House.

The political capital generated by the positive decision is likely to keep the AKP in office and achieve for the second time, at the next general election, a single party government, something almost unheard of in Turkey which has had 59 governments, mostly coalitions, in 81 years.

Promises of reform are no longer enough to conclude negotiations; Turkey will have to demonstrate progress on the ground before it can even begin discussing some subjects. Accession negotiations will take place in the framework of an Intergovernmental Conference where decisions need unanimity and full participation of all EU members. The negotiations will be complex. For each chapter of the negotiations, the Commissions says the Council should lay down benchmarks for the provisional closure and, where appropriate, for the opening of negotiations, *including a satisfactory track record of implementation of the acquis* (the italics are the Commission’s). Existing legal obligations in line with the *acquis* must be fulfilled before the opening of negotiations on related chapters. Long transition periods might be required. In addition, in some areas, such as structural policies and agriculture specific arrangements may be needed and, for the free movement of workers, permanent safeguards could be considered in order to avoid serious disturbances on the EU labour market.

On immigration, one of the main factors fuelling resistance among EU citizens and politicians to Turkey’s membership, Olli Rehn, who will take over as European enlargement commissioner on November 1, told the European parliament he would insist on a permanent safeguard clause for Turkey. This would allow the EU to close its borders to large numbers of labour migrants at any point in the future –not just for seven years, as is the case for Poland and the other former communist countries that joined the EU in May–. There are close to 4 million people of Turkish origin already living in the EU, 2.6 million of them in Germany (see Table 1).

Table 1. Turkish Population in EU Countries (thousands)

	Total	Turkish Nationality	EU Naturalised
Germany	2642	1912	730
France	370	196	174
Netherlands	270	96	174
Austria	200	120	80
Belgium	110	67	43
UK	70	37	33
Denmark	53	39	14
Sweden	37	14	23

Source: Report of the Independent Commission on Turkey, September 2004.

The following are some of the key points from the progress report:

- **Conclusion:** 'Turkey has achieved significant legislative progress in many areas... Important progress was made on implementation of political reforms, but these need to be further consolidated and broadened'.
- **Political reforms:** 'Political reforms, in line with the priorities in the Accession Partnership, have been introduced by... a series of constitutional and legislative changes adopted over a period of three years (2001-2004)'.
- **Economic reforms:** 'Economic stability and predictability have been substantially improved since the 2001 economic crisis. Previously high inflation has come down to historic lows, political interference reduced and the institutional and regulatory framework has been brought closer to international standards'.
- **Military reforms:** 'The government has increasingly asserted its control over the military. Although the process of aligning civil-military relations with EU practice is underway, the armed forces in Turkey continue to exercise influence through a series of informal channels'.
- **Judicial reforms:** 'The independence and efficiency of the judiciary were strengthened'.
- **Human rights:** 'Concerning... the respect of human rights and the exercise of fundamental freedoms, Turkey has acceded to most relevant international and European conventions'.
- **Torture:** 'The authorities have adopted a zero tolerance policy towards torture and a number of perpetrators have been punished. Torture is no longer systematic, but numerous cases of ill-treatment, including torture, still continue to occur and further efforts will be required to eradicate such practices'.
- **Women's rights:** 'The situation of women is still unsatisfactory; discrimination and violence against women, including "honour killings", remain a major problem'.
- **Children's rights:** 'Children's rights were strengthened, but child labour remains an issue of serious concern'.
- **Minority rights:** 'The OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe] High Commissioner on National Minorities could play a valuable role in assisting Turkey to move towards full compliance with modern international standards on the treatment of minorities, including the Kurds'.
- **Freedom of religion:** 'Although freedom of religious belief is guaranteed by the constitution... non-Muslim religious communities continue to experience problems'.
- **Freedom of the press:** 'Notable progress has been made, (but)... journalists, writers and publishers continue to be sentenced for reasons that contravene the standards of the European Court of Human Rights'.

Economic Impact on the EU and Cost of Membership

The other report looks at the issues arising from Turkey's membership perspective. The changes in surface area, population and GDP brought about by the recent enlargement as well as those implied by the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania (probably in 2007) and Turkey (no earlier than 2015) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Turkish Population in EU Countries (thousands)

	Increase in Surface Area (%)	Increase in Population (%)	Increase in Total GDP ¹ (%)	Change in Per Capita GDP ² (%)	Average per Capita GDP ² (EU-15 = 100)
EU-15/EU-25	23	20	4.7	-8.8	91.2
EU-25/EU-27	9	6	0.7	-4.3	87.4
EU-27/EU-27 + Turkey ³	18	15	2.2	-9.1	79.4

(1) In euros.

(2) In PPS, 2003 GDP data.

(3) Without prejudice to the accession of any other country in the meantime, eg, Croatia.

Source: Eurostat, NSI, calculations DG REGIO.

The most important consideration, at least in the public's eyes, is the economic impact and cost. The report says the impact of Turkey's accession on the EU economy would be positive but relatively small, both due to the modest size of the Turkish economy and to the degree of economic integration already existing (in 1996 Turkey became the first and so far the only non-EU member to form a Customs Union with the Union for industrial goods and processed agricultural products before becoming a full member).

Merchandise trade with the EU-25 accounted in 2003 for more than half of total Turkish trade: 58% of its exports went to EU-25 and 52% of its imports came from this area. On the other hand, the role of Turkey in EU imports and exports is still modest; in 2003, around 2.5% of EU imports from third countries came from Turkey and 3% of EU exports to third countries went to Turkey.

Although Turkey's population is relatively large (by 2015 it would be on a par with Germany's 80 million and by 2025 much larger at 89 million), its GDP represents just over 2% of the EU-25 GDP. As a consequence, the beneficial economic effects of Turkey's membership in the EU are likely to be asymmetric, ie, small for the EU-25 as a whole and much larger for Turkey. The effects on the EU will very much depend on the way the Turkish economy will be able to cope with its preparation for membership.

Accession of Turkey, a lower middle income country, would increase regional economic disparities in the enlarged EU in a way similar to the most recent enlargement, and would represent a major challenge for cohesion policy. Turkey would qualify for significant support from the structural and cohesion funds over a long period of time. All of its regions have a per capita GDP way below 75% of the EU average, the threshold for funds (that of Van is 8%), and the country would also be eligible for assistance under the Cohesion Fund. There is a pronounced east-west divide, with the main centres of economic activity located in the western part of Turkey. These are benefiting from trade with the rest of the world, tourism, a higher level of investment as well as better infrastructure endowment. Sixty three per cent of the Turkish population is living in roughly half the land area, accounting for 78% of national GDP and with GDP per head 23% above the national average. A number of regions in present member states, including Spain, benefiting from structural funds support will lose their eligibility on the basis of present rules.

The Commission says it is difficult to provide a meaningful estimate of the impact, both on Turkey and on other member states or candidate countries of extending the EU's cohesion and regional policy to Turkey. For illustrative purposes, it calculates that based on continued real annual GDP growth of 4%-5%, by 2025 annual transfers would amount to just over €5.6 billion (2004 prices) for each one percentage point of Turkey's GDP granted in regional aid.

The full budgetary impact can only be fully assessed once the parameters for the financial negotiations with Turkey have been defined in the context of the financial perspectives from 2014 onwards. The nature and amount of transfers to Turkey would depend on a number of changing factors, such as the EU's policies and any special arrangements agreed with Turkey in the negotiations as well as the budgetary provisions in place at that time, in particular the overall budgetary ceiling. However, it is clear that the impact on the basis of present policies would be substantial.

Turkey's membership will force a profound reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In 2003, over one third of the Turkish labour force was employed in the agricultural sector while output only amounted to 12.2% of GDP. In the EU-25, the 5% of the labour force that is in agriculture generates 2.2% of total value added. Based on current *acquis*, the cost of extending the existing CAP including rural development to Turkey would amount to €8.2 billion (2004 prices) by 2025, the first year it is assumed 100% of direct payments would be due.

European Security and Defence Policy

With its large military expenditure and manpower, Turkey has the capacity to contribute significantly to EU security and defence: Turkish military expenditure is among the highest of all members of NATO (which Turkey joined in 1952) at 2.6% of GDP in 2004, while its 793,000 military personnel constitute 27% of the forces of NATO's European members, and represent 3.9% of Turkey's labour force (compared with 1.7% on average in other European NATO countries).

Turkey has increasingly cooperated on European Security and Defence Policy matters since the mid-1990s. The dialogue has led to a considerable degree of convergence between EU and Turkish views on CFSP issues. Turkey's record of alignment with EU political declarations, Common Positions and Joint Actions, and other CFSP measures demonstrates the extent of shared views. However, despite its generally satisfactory record, Turkey aligns itself with significantly fewer EU declarations than other acceding and associated countries, the report points out.

Turkey is hesitant to align itself to EU positions on issues which it feels touch its vital foreign policy and security interests, in particular regarding its geographical neighbourhood (Iraq, the Caucasus, etc.) and human rights and developments in Muslim countries, where it insists on a distinct national position.

As of 2003 Turkey had sizeable contingents in Afghanistan (ISAF), in Bosnia (SFOR II) and in Kosovo (KFOR), and it has been entrusted with the leadership of the multinational ISAF contingents in Afghanistan.

Impact on institutions

Turkey's EU membership will have a big impact on various institutions, most notably the European Parliament and the European Council. Under the proposed new constitution the parliament will have no more than 750 seats after 2009, with a minimum threshold of six seats and a maximum ceiling of 96 seats per member state. The increase from the current 732 to 750 seats is intended to accommodate further enlargements of the Union, and Turkey's accession would significantly affect the allocation of seats to current states. In particular the medium and large countries will have to give up seats to accommodate Turkey's accession.

As far as the Council voting system is concerned, the constitution introduces as from 1 November 2009 and with regard to qualified majority voting the principle of double majority (55% of the members of the Council comprising at least 15 of them and representing countries comprising at least 65% of the EU's population). In addition, a

blocking minority must include at least four Council members. With the accession of Turkey a blocking minority could be more easily achieved from the population side by a small number of larger states. As a consequence, in an EU-27 plus Turkey the latter would have a weight in decision-making more or less equivalent to its above-mentioned share of population in the EU, giving it an important voice in the decision-making process. Turkey's accession will have less institutional impact as regards the Commission.

Conclusion: The decision to open accession negotiations is a defining moment in the Union's almost 50-year existence. Turkey's full membership will have profound implications in all spheres including that of helping the EU to become a power in global foreign policy.

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