

## Europeanization in Turkey and accession process to the European Union

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**Abstract.** Turkey is still waiting to be one of the European Union's members. More than 50 years ago Turkey's government first asked to join the European Union. During the time, other countries have joined, expanding the 6 members European club to 28. Unfortunately, even the most optimistic scenario says Turkey is unlikely to be part of the EU for at least another decade. While the European Union is working with Turkey to help it move toward being able to become a member of the European Union, there are some politicians and economists who are concerned about Turkey's potential membership. Those opposed to Turkish membership in the EU point to several issues that Turkey isn't in Europe geographically, culturally; Turkey isn't a part of Europe. Besides Turkey has a large population, high unemployment rate and migration as a potential problem for the EU. Accession of Turkey to the Union would be challenging both for the EU and Turkey. If incorporating will be well managed, it would offer important opportunities for both parties. Referred to above this paper aims at providing a brief overview of the EU's accession process and Turkey's path to the EU membership. Main hypothesis assumes that the Turkey's accession to the EU is not simply down to a failure to comply with the official membership criteria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Turkey is a candidate country for membership in the European Union (the EU) following the Helsinki European Council of December 1999. Accession negotiations have started in October 2005 with the analytical examination of the EU legislation (the so-called screening process). Since then the EU closed

provisionally one chapter: Science and Research (June 2006). In addition the EU opened negotiations on seven others: Enterprise and Industry (March 2007) and Financial Control and Statistics (June 2007), Trans-European Networks and Consumer and Health Protection (December 2007), Intellectual Property and Company Law (June 2008). On 18 February 2008 the Council adopted a revised Accession Partnership with Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

Turkey has opened only 11 of 35 policy chapters that need to be negotiated, successfully closing just one. This is partly due to the issue of Cyprus problem, still divided between Greek and Turkish sides: Eight of the chapters are formally blocked because Turkey still refuses to open its ports and airports to traffic from Greek Cyprus. The main problem Turkey might have during accession negotiations is its non-recognition of Cyprus, a full-fledged member of the European Union.

Secondly, the different political and cultural identities assume different attitudes towards the European Union integration process of Turkey. Turkey's culture and values are different from those of the European Union.

Additionally, many people are concerned about the human rights, migration, Turkey's large population and low well-being of the Turkish population.

Based on above shown problems this study main hypothesis is constructed as: the Turkey's accession to the EU is not simply down to a failure to comply with the official membership criteria.

## GENESIS OF THE TURKEY'S ACCESSION PROCESS TOWARDS THE EU

The European Union views enlargement as an historic opportunity to promote stability and prosperity throughout Europe. The criteria for EU membership require candidates to adopt political values and norms shared by the Union by achieving stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.<sup>2</sup>

The largest expansion of the EU was accomplished in 2004 when the EU accepted 10 new member states. In January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU; Croatia has joined in 2013 bringing the Union to its current 28 member states. Since then, the EU has continued supporting the enlargement process, Turkey which was given candidate status in December 2010.

Turkey and the European Commission (further the Commission) first concluded an Association Agreement (Ankara Agreement) aimed at developing closer economic ties in 1963. A key provision of that agreement was the commitment by Turkey to establish a Customs Union that would be applied to each member states. In 1987, Turkey's first application for full membership was deferred until 1993 on the grounds that the European Commission was not considering new members at the time. Although not technically a rejection of Turkey, the decision did add Turkey to a list, along with the United Kingdom, of nations which have been initially turned down for membership in the Union. In 1995, a Customs Union agreement between the EU and Turkey entered into force, setting a path for deeper integration of Turkey's economy with that of Europe's. In 1997, the Luxembourg EU Summit confirmed Turkey's eligibility for accession to the EU but failed to put Turkey on a clear track to membership.

Turkey is formally as a candidate at the 1999 Helsinki Council. In February 2001, the EU formally adopted an "Accession Partnership" with Turkey, which set out the priorities Turkey needed to address in order to adopt and implement EU standards and legislation. Although Ankara had hoped the EU would

<sup>1</sup> European Commission Enlargement (<http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries>)

<sup>2</sup> European Council in Copenhagen, Denmark, June (1993). *Conclusions of The Presidency*,

set a firm date for initiating negotiations at the December 2002 EU Copenhagen Summit, no agreement was reached. Two years later, 10 new member states, including a divided Cyprus, were admitted into the Union. In December 2004, and despite the fact that Turkey had still not met its obligations regarding the application of its Customs Union to the EU member states, the European Council stated unanimously that Turkey had made enough progress in legislative process, economic stability, and judicial reform to proceed with accession talks within a year.<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of the Council's decision, the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly to support the Council's decision to move forward with Turkey. Between 2007 and 2011, the accession process muddled along with a mixed sense of direction and very little accomplishment. Turkey's accession process entered France's 2007 presidential election campaign, during which conservative candidate and then-Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy, in a campaign speech, stated that he felt Turkey should never become a member of the Union.

In early 2009, Turkey, in a sign of a renewed commitment to the accession process, announced the appointment of its first full-time EU accession negotiator, State Minister Egemen Bagis, and it has moved ahead on a number of reform fronts. In June, the 11th chapter of the *acquis* was opened.

Turkey's continued refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to the EU member state South Cyprus, or to open Turkey's sea and air ports to South Cypriot shipping and commerce until a political settlement has been achieved on South Cyprus as well as Turkey's position on the South Cyprus were repeatedly named by the EU presidency were again cited as problematic. On December 11, 2012, the European Council released its conclusions on enlargement. While the Council struck a more positive note regarding Turkey's importance to the EU, noted the implementation of the "positive agenda", and listed several issues where the Council felt Turkey had made progress, it nevertheless repeated the shortfalls outlined in the Commission's earlier assessment.<sup>4</sup>

## **CYPRUS AS A REGIONAL ISSUE**

Cyprus gained independence from Britain in 1960. Three years later, inter-communal violence broke out between the Mediterranean island's Greek and Turkish communities, which eventually led to a Greek-sponsored attempt to seize power in 1974 and a military intervention by Turkey. Greek Cypriot refugees fled to the South as Turkey seized the island's northern part., Turkish Cypriots have taken the northern part instead. In 1983, the Turkish-held northern part of the island declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognised by Ankara alone.

In May 2004, the Greek Cypriot-controlled (Republic of Cyprus) became a full member of the EU. The year 2006 became a more difficult year in Turkey relations with the EU, even as formal negotiations between Brussels and Ankara has begun. The membership of Cyprus in the Union, despite the Greek Cypriot rejection of a UN- sponsored unification plan. Referred to this decision Turkey's public stance not to deal with the Greek Cypriot government, served to aggravate relations further and, in the opinion of some observers, may have contributed to changing attitudes of Turkey and the EU toward each other.<sup>5</sup>

At the outset, Cyprus expressed its opposition to formally opening and closing of the first of 35 negotiation chapters unless Ankara met its obligations to recognize all 10 new EU member states, including Cyprus. On June 16, 2006, the EU Presidency issued a statement that referred implicitly to Turkey's continued refusal to open its ports to Greek Cyprus as required by Turkey's Customs Union with the EU. The EU

<sup>3</sup> European Union Enlargement (January 8, 2013), *A Status Report on Turkey's Accession Negotiations*.

<sup>4</sup> Positive EU-Turkey agenda launched in Ankara [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-12-359\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-359_en.htm) (2012)

<sup>5</sup> Turkey accession and Cyprus <http://www.euractiv.com/enlargement/turkey-accession-cyprus-links dossier-188330>

again asserted that Turkey's failure to implement its obligations fully will have an impact on the negotiation process.<sup>6</sup>

This decision has brought Turkey to the point of making a choice between taking one-sided steps or not since the EU has failed to fulfill its promises to Turkish Cypriots in response for their cooperation to resolve the conflict under the auspices of the United Nations (the Annan Plan).<sup>7</sup> Turkish Cypriots on April 24 voted 64.9 percent to 35.1 percent in favor of accepting the plan, while Greek Cypriots voted 75.8 percent to 24.2 percent against. The Turkish-Cypriot leaders and the Greek-Cypriot leaders have been negotiating the unification of the island under the guidance of the UN. However, despite claims that there is a commitment to find a comprehensive solution, there are certain key issues on which nobody wants to compromise.

Turkey-EU relations impose to block or slow down Turkey's accession partly due to the actions of the Republic of Cyprus as a member state and largely because other EU member states can support or hide behind this problem. On the other hand, Turkey's accession negotiations, which are currently proceeding at a slow pace, risk grinding to a halt because of the chapters directly or indirectly blocked by the Cyprus conflict.<sup>8</sup>

## EUROPEAN IDENTITY

The uniquely European problem of identity has become a far larger issue today than it ever was in the past. Enlargement of the EU up to 28 members countries has created a crisis of identity. This has influenced a raising problem (religion and cultural) in the relation of Europe and Turkey's - accession has played a central role in the development of this debate.

While most of Turkey lies geographically in Asia (the peninsula is Asian), far western Turkey lies in Europe. Turkey's largest city is Istanbul, with a population of over 9 million inhabitants. The city is located on both the east and west sides of the Bosphorus strait. Therefore it straddles both: what are traditionally considered Europe and Asia (Rosenberg, 2008). It is even more difficult for a nation to: consider itself part of Europe if it is mostly Asian with a majority which is different in religion and ethnicity, and if it had been a military adversary of Western Europe for hundreds of years. Europeans have historically seen the Ottoman Empire, precursor to the Modern Turkish state, as a military threat.<sup>9</sup> Turkey as a successor of the Ottoman Empire and Islam have for centuries acted as 'the other' to the peoples of Europe. This feeling has been the basis of huge change in the Turkish Republic since the end of the empire. For many people it is recognised Turkey Islamic culture must be made "*less visible*" for a future Europe to include (Mehmet, Nergis, 2004, p.229).

It is important to remember the more than 3 million Turks that already live within the borders of the EU. In the same way that the EU elite is helping to influence Europeans attitudes towards a European identity that this Turkish minority highlights the 'social fact of an ongoing process linking Turkish and European identities that significantly pre-dates the formal process of Turkey's accession to the EU (Katzenstein, Checkel, 2009, p. 71).

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<sup>6</sup> Council of the European Union - 15/16 June (2006), Presidency Conclusions, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu>

<sup>7</sup> Republic of turkey ministry of foreign affairs. [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-annan-plan-and-the-greek-cypriot\\_no\\_\\_-false-reasons-and-claims.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-annan-plan-and-the-greek-cypriot_no__-false-reasons-and-claims.en.mfa)

<sup>8</sup> EU-Turkey Accession Negotiations. <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org>

<sup>9</sup> Turkey's Difficult Entry into the European Union <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/turkeys-difficult-entry-into-the-european-union.html>

## ECONOMIC CRITERIA OF TURKEY'S ACCESSION

Economic aspects of the accession of Turkey to the EU is one of the main issues on the road to finalizing discussions and actions. Some integration effects are already visible in the context of the EU-Turkey Customs Union. Accession itself can provide a further boost to economic growth and prosperity in Turkey, as well as a positive, but much smaller, impact on the present EU member states.

The association relationship between Turkey and the EU dates back to 1963, when Ankara Agreement was signed. The agreement, which entered into force on 1 December 1964, has drawn up the framework of institutional relations between both sides, paving the way for the Turkey's full membership to the EU. In this framework, the agreement besides aiming to establish free transfer of goods between Turkey and the European Council also aims to provide free movement of labor, services and capital in order to integrate Turkey to the European Single Market.

The Customs Union, established between the parties on 1st January 1996 as foreseen by the Additional Protocol which entered into force on 1 January 1973, was a breakthrough in bilateral relations between Turkey and the EU, and brought the integration process to a critical level. Essentially the Customs Union gives Turkey improved access to the group of countries previously known as the Common Market. It guarantees the free circulation of industrial goods and processed agricultural products. Customs duties and charges have been abolished and quantitative restrictions such as quotas are prohibited. The Customs Union involves harmonization of Turkey's commercial and competition policies including intellectual property laws with those of the European Union and it extends most of the EU's trade and competition rules to the Turkish economy.

As a result of the Customs Union, Turkey has opened its internal market to the competition of the EU and third countries, while guaranteeing free access of its exporters to the EU market. In addition, Turkey has undertaken to align itself to the preferential regimes applied to third countries by the EU and to harmonize its legislation with the EU's *acquis communautaire* in a wide spectrum of areas, including the standards and technical legislation, as well as competition policies. As an excuse, trade in agricultural products is managed in the framework of the preferential system between the agreement sides. Nevertheless, trade in iron and steel products is governed by the Free Trade Agreement between Turkey and the European Coal and Steel Community. Consequently, the Turkish economy has been integrated with one of the most competitive economic bloc of the world and obviously that has given the biggest impetus to Turkish economy since the adoption of liberalization measures of the early 1980s.

As a consequence of this high level of integration, traditionally comprehensive economic relations between Turkey and the EU, especially in trade and investments, have been strengthened significantly. Also the volume of trade increased highly, its shown in the table 1.

Table 1

Volume of trade between Turkey and EU zone (data in billion USD, selected years 1995-2012)

Years	Volume of trade, billons of USD
1995	30.2
2000	49.7
2005	60.1
2010	115.8
2011	153.6
2012	163.2

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, *TURKSTAT* (2011 <http://www.tuik.gov.tr>).

In this respect, the volume of trade increased from 30.2 billion USD in 1995 to 163.2 billion USD in 2012. By 2011, Turkey's exports to the EU reached 62.4 billion USD and its imports from the EU reached 91.2 billion USD. In this context, the EU accounts for 46.2 percent of total exports and 37.9 percent of total imports of Turkey. On the other hand, Turkey is an important trade partner of the EU according to the foreign trade statistics of the EU, indicating that in 2011 Turkey ranked seventh at imports and fifth at exports of the EU with shares of 2.8 percent and 4.8 percent respectively.<sup>10</sup> The EU's share in Turkey's overall international trade volume dropped from 48% to 42% in March on a year on year basis. The level of EU-Turkish trade reached 14.9 billion USD in the first quarter of 2012, down from 15.1 billion USD in 2011.

Following the establishment of the Customs Union, the product composition of Turkish exports transformed parallelly to changing scales and structure of production due to the improved competition conditions and market access advantages. Apart from traditional sectors like agriculture, textile and clothing, certain high value added sectors such as durable goods and automotive increased shares in total exports. It influenced competitiveness in the EU and on the world market. Trade volume with EU countries during the Custom Union period created beneficial effects on Turkish economy especially by means of increasing competitive pressure for falling mark-ups and market power. Hence, it is clear that there are welfare impacts as a result of such changes in the pricing behaviour and market structure of the Turkish manufacturing industry<sup>11</sup>

In this respect, in Turkey's exports between 1995 and 2012, the share of agricultural products decreased from 17.6 percent to 7.7 percent and the share of textile and clothing products decreased from 48 percent to 26.4 percent; while the share of automotive products increased from 2.8 percent to 18.2 percent, the share of machinery products increased from 3.2 percent to 9.7 percent and the share of iron and steel products increased from 4.3 percent to 7.3 percent. In addition to that, Turkey attracted 97.4 billion USD foreign direct investments (FDIs) in total from 1996 to 2012, which is 1019 percent higher than the previous 15 year period, from 1980 to 1995, when the sum of the foreign direct investments reached 8.7 billion USD. The share of the EU in the total FDIs to Turkey reached 70.8 percent in 2012.

The accession negotiation process has also strengthened the positive outcome of the Customs Union on economic relations between Turkey and the EU. Also this would be further enhanced of Turkey's full membership. During the Helsinki European Council held on 10-11 December 1999, Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate country, without any precondition. Thus Turkey, like the other candidates, became eligible to benefit from a pre-accession strategy to stimulate and support its reforms and to participate in the EU programs open to candidate countries and agencies. With the launch of the accession process, Turkey has undertaken to align its legislation to the whole *acquis communautaire*, beyond its obligations stemming from the Customs Union.

With the confirmation of Turkey's fulfillment to the Copenhagen political criteria by the 2004 Progress Report and the Recommendation Document of the European Commission, the European Council of December 2004 decided to initiate Turkey's accession negotiations. In this framework, the Accession Negotiations Framework Document for Turkey, defining the principles governing the negotiations, the substance of negotiations, negotiating procedures and list of negotiation chapter headings, was adopted by the EU Council on 3 October 2005 and the accession negotiations have been started. The Accession Negotiations Framework Document emphasized that the ultimate objective of negotiations is full membership. Currently, negotiations are provisionally closed regarding one chapter mentioned above (Science and Research) and continue on 12 chapters. However, accession negotiations have been suspended on 8 chapters by the European Council on 14-15 December 2006, claiming that Turkey does not fully implement the Additional

<sup>10</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy. Turkey- EU27 Customs Union and Accession Process.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor & Francis Online Effects of the customs union with the European Union on the market structure and pricing behaviour of the Turkish manufacturing industry Volume 38, Issue 20, 2006

Protocol. In this respect, until the European Council decides that Turkey fulfills its commitment stemming from the Additional Protocol, screening reports will be prepared, opening criteria will be determined, but negotiations will not start in the said chapters and negotiations will not be closed in any chapters.

The progress achieved in the framework of Turkey's accession negotiations, is being assessed in the Progress Reports published annually by the Commission. In this respect, the 2012 Turkey Progress Report, published on 10 October 2012, confirmed that regarding the chapters on Free Movement of Goods and on External Relations, for which the Ministry of Economy is responsible, a high level of harmonization with the EU *acquis* has already been achieved.

The Pre-Accession Economic Programme (PEP) submitted to the Commission in January 2012 reflects commitments to a rebalancing process away from debt fuelling consumption towards exports. Although such adjustment process is positive for economic stability, Turkey has large external imbalances, and remains vulnerable to further global financial shocks, in particular capital flow reversals. As more ministries and governing structures have been created, the fragmentation of responsibilities between government bodies appears to be increasingly complicating coordination for budgeting and medium-term economic policy making. Decisions are sometimes taken on an ad hoc basis and impact assessments are either based on lacking or partial information. However, there have been no major instances of internal conflicts and tensions in economic policies in recent times. Overall, the consensus on economic policy essentials has been preserved.<sup>12</sup>

## MAASTRICHT CRITERIA AND TURKEY

The Maastricht criteria, which are assumed to sustain the European Union in the future, specify in two separate protocols five conditions by which a country is admitted to the Union:

1. Price stability: The inflation rate which is no more than 1.5 percent points higher than the 3 best performing member states of the EU which basically means an inflation rate under 3 per cent under present conditions.
2. Exchange rate stability: The national currency's exchange rate should have stayed within certain pre-set margins of fluctuation for two years. These criteria were laid down in the Treaty of Maastricht hence their name.
3. Interest rates: The long-term rate should be no more than two percentage points above the rate in the three EU countries with the lowest inflation over the previous year.
4. Debt: The national debt should not exceed 60 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but a country with a higher level of debt can still adopt the euro provided its debt level are falling steadily.
5. Budget deficit: Government deficit which must not exceed 3 percent of GDP

The first three convergence criteria are designed to ensure monetary stability by supporting a fixed exchange rate regime among member countries. The stability of the euro is reinforced by the last two criteria, which protect the European Union from threats of inflation which may arise from government budget deficits (Afxentiou, 2000).

The purpose of setting these criteria is to maintain the price stability within the Eurozone even with the inclusion of new member states. Tables below show to what extent Turkey met the first three of these criteria in the most recent period. The most recent Turkish inflation rate was not only higher than the EU

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<sup>12</sup> European Commission, Turkey 2012 Progress Report. [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2012/package/tr\\_rapport\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/tr_rapport_2012_en.pdf)

target or the EU average, but also higher than in the worst-performing EU member state, which is Romania. However, given that Turkey consistently had double digit inflation which ranged above 60 percent throughout the 1990s, the recent lowering below the level of 10 percent must be considered a major achievement. The public debt situation also improved recently. The annual government deficit is even below the EU-27 average, whereas the accumulated public debt has been lowered considerably since the economic downturn in 2001 and is now not far above the EU-27 average and lower than in three old EU-member states (Italy, Greece, and Belgium). In sum, Turkey seems to be on a positive path of gradual convergence to the Maastricht criteria.<sup>13</sup>

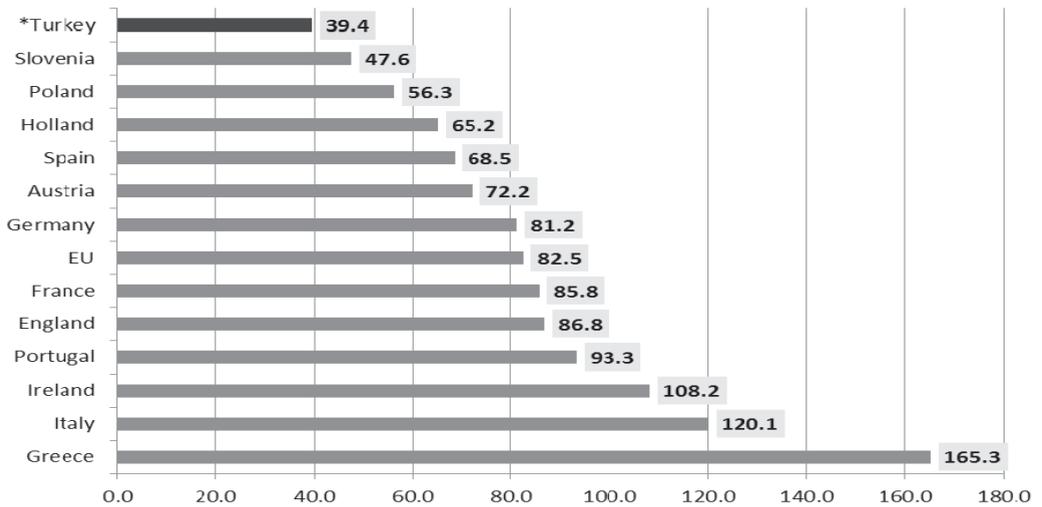


Figure 1. Government Debt / GDP (%)

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, *TURKSTAT* (2011 <http://tuikapp.tuik.gov.tr/Gosterge/?locale=en> )

Debt/GDP ratio of Turkey was 39.4 percent in 2011, which was below the level in 21 EU countries and the Maastricht criteria (60 percent).

<sup>13</sup> Eurostat, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Exchange\\_rates\\_and\\_interest\\_rates](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Exchange_rates_and_interest_rates) 2012

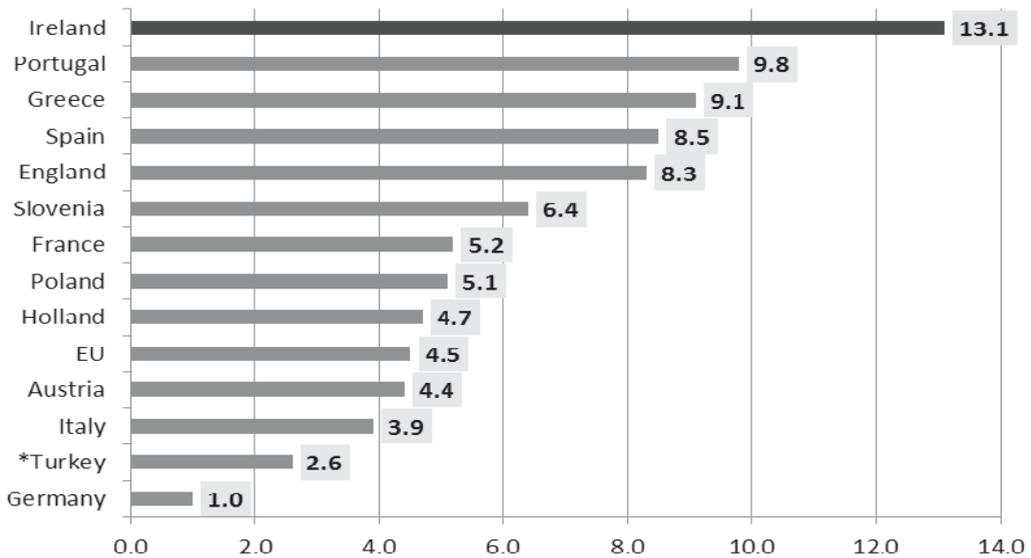


Figure 2. EU Defined Budget Deficit / GDP (%)

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, *TURKSTAT* (2011 <http://tuikapp.tuik.gov.tr/Gosterge/?locale=en>)

The EU defined general government budget deficit/GDP ratio was 2.6 percent in Turkey in 2011 and Turkey satisfied the Maastricht criteria of 3 percent. Turkey also outperformed 18 EU countries. Central government budget deficit/GDP ratio was 1.3 percent in Turkey in 2011 and Turkey outperformed 23 EU Countries. In January – April 2012, central government budget deficit has increased to 5 billion dollars. Turkish Economy expanded by 8.5 percent in 2011, which was well beyond the expectations of the IMF (7.5 percent). The inflation in 2011 realized as 10.4 percent, in 2012 realized as 6.16 percent.

On the financial side, Turkey has also successfully managed its public finances. As defined by the EU, general government nominal debt stock fell to 39.4 percent from 74 percent in the period 2002 to 2011. Turkey has also met “60 percent EU Maastricht criteria” for public debt stock since 2004. Similarly, during 2002-2011, the budget deficit decreased from more than 10 percent to less than 3 percent again meaning that Turkey has met one of the important EU Maastricht criteria. The main objective of the monetary policy is to establish and maintain price stability. As a supporting objective, the financial stability is also continued to be preserved. Turkey successfully implemented its combination of monetary and fiscal policies during the crisis and has been extremely successful in preventing possible imbalances<sup>14</sup>. As indicated in the Pre-Accession Economic Programme, the objective is to reduce the inflation rate in alignment with Maastricht criteria. All of these indicators point to the fact that Turkey would actually fulfill the Maastricht criteria for entry into the Eurozone. Turkey had fulfilled the EU’s economic criteria, Maastricht criteria, better than many EU member states.

<sup>14</sup> 2012 Progress Report prepared by Turkey. <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=48402&l=2>

## THE KURDISH ISSUE

The Kurd population, stretches across at least 4 countries, historically, in 1990, estimates suggested that probably numbering close to 16 million Kurds, inhabits the wide arc from eastern Turkey and the northwestern part of Syria through Azerbaijan and Iraq to the northwest of the Zagros Mountains in Iran. They have represented the population of what has been referred to as (Kurdistan). Today, about the half of all Kurds worldwide live in Turkey. Most of the rest live in adjacent regions of Iran, Iraq, and Syria. They represent by far the largest non-Arab ethnic minority of Iraq, between 15 and 20 percent of the population. Also they constitute Turkey's largest non-Turkish ethnic and linguistic group. Turkey still has the dominant Kurdish population in the region, with an estimated 14 million. Iraq is estimated to have a population of some 4-6 million Kurds, with another 4-5 million in Iran. Kurdish populations that represented less than 10 percent of the total population in countries such as Syria and Azerbaijan as well.<sup>15</sup>

According to the CIA World Factbook, as of 2008 approximately 20 percent of Turkey's population consisted of ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>16</sup> Despite this fact Turkey's Constitution provides a single nationality designation for all Turks and thus does not recognize ethnic groups as national, racial, or ethnic minorities. Therefore a true census has been historically unavailable. Citizens of Kurdish origin have constituted a large ethnic and linguistic group in Turkey. Since 1984 the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) waged a violent terrorist insurgency in southeast Turkey, directed against both security forces and civilians. Almost all of them were Kurds, whom the PKK accuses of cooperating with the State. The government of Turkey in turn waged an intense campaign to suppress PKK terrorism, targeting active PKK units as well as persons they believe support or sympathize with the PKK. In the process, both government forces and Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK terrorists committed human rights abuses against each other and noncombatants. According to the government, from the beginning of PKK attacks, 26.532 PKK members, 5.185 security force members, and 5.209 civilians lost their lives in the fighting. Turkish government has been negotiating with Abdullah Ocalan, the founding head of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) who is serving a life sentence in prison. Turkey's mainstream media has labeled these negotiations "the Imrali process." This so-called process has yet to pave the way for peace negotiations with the PKK.

The Kurdish issue and options for a solution were widely discussed; however, the 2009 democratic reforms opening aimed at addressing amongst others the Kurdish issue was not followed through.<sup>17</sup> Erdogan's government began secret talks with the leaders of Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK leaders. Justice and Development Party (AKP),<sup>18</sup> also made a number of overtures toward the Kurds, including bans on Kurdish language education, appearing to apologize for past discriminatory policies and launching a state Kurdish-language TV station. The Justice and Development Party AKP actually did more for the Kurds than anyone up until now.

Over the last decade, Turkey succeeded in forging alliances with neighboring Iran, Syria and Iraq to target Kurdish rebels operating in their respective territories. But Turkey's relations with all three governments have deteriorated sharply over the past several years, and the conflict threatens to spill across borders (Watson, Comert, 2012).

Terrorist attacks by PKK members, which are on the EU list of terrorist organizations, multiplied, intensified and claimed many victims. The attacks were strongly condemned by the EU. There has been a

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<sup>15</sup> Kurdish conflict. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan.htm>

<sup>16</sup> CIA World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, Turkey 2012 Progress Report. [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2012/package/tr\\_rapport\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/tr_rapport_2012_en.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.akparti.org.tr/english>

worrying increase in kidnappings of security personnel and civilians, including elected politicians. The high number of arrests and detentions in the context of operations against the Union of Communities of Kurdistan (KCK), the alleged urban wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, led to serious tension. The government announced that the state had abandoned confidential talks with PKK leaders, but expressed the intention to continue a dialogue with political parties not associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

Turkey's inability to come to grips with its Kurdish citizens' demand for cultural recognition not only prevents a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem but also impedes the country's acceptance by, integration into, and identification with Europe and the West. The European Union, which Turkey wants to join, has consistently maintained that improvements in Turkey's human rights record are required if its candidacy for EU membership is to be successful.

## THE ARMENIAN CASE

Today some 70 000 Armenians still live in Turkey, most of them in Istanbul. When The First World War began, the Armenians and Turks had been living together for 800 years. The Armenians of Anatolia and Europe had been Ottoman possession for nearly 400 years. Everyone in the Empire suffered, but they are Turks and other Muslims who suffered the most.

Judged by all economic and social standards, the Armenians did well under Ottoman rule. By the late nineteenth century, in every Ottoman province the Armenians were better educated and richer than the Muslims. Armenians worked hard and their comparative riches were largely due to European and American influence and Ottoman tolerance. European merchants made Ottoman Christians their agents and set up their businesses. The Armenians benefited from the education given by American missionaries to them but not to the Turks. That was the reason by which Armenians revolted against the hundreds of years of Ottoman Empire peace, economic superiority and political conditions (McCarthy, 2005).

The plan of the Armenian nationalists has not changed in more than 100 years ago. It is to create an Armenia in Eastern Anatolia and the Southern Caucasus, regardless of the wishes of the people who live there. The Armenian nationalists have made their plan quite clear. First, the Turkish Republic is to state that there was the Armenian Genocide and to apologize for it. Second, the Turks are to pay reparations.

Turkish officials accept that atrocities were committed but argue that there was no systematic attempt to destroy the Christian Armenian people. Turkey assumed many innocent Muslim Turks also died in the turmoil of war. Argentina, Belgium, Canada, France, Italy, Russia and Uruguay are among more than 20 countries which have formally recognized genocide against the Armenians.

After decades of hostility there has been a slight thaw. Turkey and Armenia signed a deal in October 2009 to establish diplomatic relations and open their border. But the deal is yet to be ratified by either parliament, and some in Ankara accuse Armenia of trying to alter the terms of the deal.<sup>19</sup> A complicating factor is mutual suspicion over the frozen Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Turkey backs Azerbaijan in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory inside Azerbaijan held by ethnic Armenians since a war in the 1990s.

The European Union seriously challenges the conventional minority regime of Turkey. The Commission, via its annual progress reports on Turkey, the Council, via its summit decisions, and the European Parliament, via oral and written questions addressed in the Assembly, emphasize the need for better treatment of minorities in Turkey and call on Turkey to improve its human as well as minority rights record. The EU progress reports on Turkey have included calls for reform on the issues of protection of minorities and minority rights (Hughes, Sasse, 2003). The importance of these reports comes from their content, which

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-armenia.en.mfa>

consists of expectations of Turkey in the accession process and the Commission's monitoring of Turkey's achievements and progress in this regard. The reports present a comparative assessment of Turkey's fulfillment of political criteria in relation to the previous years and also include shortcomings in the area of minority rights and the protection of minorities.

## RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Turkey is a Muslim-majority country but constitutionally a secular state that guarantees substantial rights to religious minorities. According to the Turkish government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which is Hanafi Sunni. According to representatives of various religious communities, the actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower.<sup>20</sup> Within Turkey's accession bid, a new law was recently passed, which now finally enables Christian and other non-Muslim groups to set up foundations permitting them to own land.

Additionally, there are Muslim religious minorities, in particular the large Alevi community a Muslim sect which is different to the majority Sunnis, whose population is estimated at 12-15 million. The Alevi community seems is not be different from the majority of Sunni Muslims to Turkey (Farah Mihlar).

The EU has flagged religious freedoms as an important criteria Turkey has to meet as part of its accession bid and Turkey needs to speed up its reform process. Turkey's foreign policy with respect to international treaties seeks to ensure that no minorities other than non-Muslims are given legal protection. If the treaty in question is specifically on minority rights, the policy is one of non-signature, as in the case of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM).

The combination of the Turkish Constitution and foreign policy serves a dual purpose: ensuring that Turkey remains in compliance with the Treaty of Lausanne without granting non-Muslims minority status in the Constitution and preventing the widening or deepening of Lausanne's protection. On the other hand, Turkey's foreign policy particularly towards Greece, Iraq and Western Europe, zealously advocates for the religious freedoms and political rights of ethnic Turks in these countries, and thus points to a fundamental contradiction. It also weakens the sense of citizenship and belonging of its own minorities.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Turkey as the 18th biggest economy in the world is one of the most influential emerging countries.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Turkey is also probably one of the most active middle powers country on the global stage. Turkey's global position would be impossible without substantial increase of economic potential. It allowed Turkey to increase substantially its official development aid, financial support for education institutions abroad and scholarships for foreign students the number of the Turkish construction contracts (second place in the world after China) direct investment abroad and foreign trade volume. Consequently, Turkish foreign policy underwent considerable changes. For the first time it has become significantly more based on soft power than hard power. Also, Turkey's foreign policy acquired a clearly more assertive and independent character (Balcer, 2012).

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<sup>20</sup> 2010 International Religious Freedom Report – Turkey, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/>

<sup>21</sup> World Directory of Minorities. <http://www.minorityrights.org>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/Turkey-Snapshot.pdf>

A current key issue is the ability of the EU to rethink its attitude towards a new, more assertive and influential Turkey with a global position. Currently the importance of Turkey in the global dimension for the EU is mostly interpreted in the narrower context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Turkey is perceived as a rising stakeholder in the ENP whose stabilisation forms are a precondition for the realization of the EU's global ambitions. However, the EU should accept that Turkey possesses a global importance for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in a wider scope, namely in new regions and dimensions international organisations, which sometimes seems to be underestimated. Therefore, the EU should start perceiving to perceive cooperation with Turkey as a possible asset in its relations with the entire Muslim world. No single EU member state possesses Turkey's advantages (emerging Muslim midsize power catching up with the most developed parts of the world) that facilitate its engagement in the developing world. Indeed, the EU has in the case of Turkey a unique opportunity to integrate into the club one of the emerging middle powers which could greatly facilitate cooperation on the global scale with similar actors. The EU should establish a special and informal mechanism of consultation with Turkey (summits, meetings) concerning their relations with international organizations, new global powers, midsize powers, the Muslim world, Afghanistan and Sub Saharan Africa.<sup>23</sup>

Based on the above, the paper's objective was to provide a brief overview of the EU's accession process and Turkey's path to EU membership. The main hypothesis is considered Turkey's accession to the EU is not simply down to a failure to comply with the official membership criteria.

Establishment of a consultation mechanism between Turkey and the EU would be beneficial for both sides because it could enable a decrease in tensions between Turkey and certain EU member states. For instance, the competing between Turkey and France in the basin of the Mediterranean Sea, which intensified in the course of the Arab Spring. Last but not least, if the EU is interested in further increase of cooperation on Turkey in the global arena, Cyprus problem, it is generally one of the main important challenges for establishment of a strategic partnership between Turkey and the EU.

As regards the East and Southeast of Turkey, there has been a considerable debate on the Kurdish issue but no progress towards a solution. Terrorist attacks intensified as military operations did. All terrorist attacks were condemned by the EU. The detention of elected politicians and human rights defenders raises concerns.<sup>24</sup> Turkey's approach to minorities tolerance and full respect for and protection of language, culture and fundamental rights in accordance with European standards has yet to be achieved.

Despite negative impacts of the economic and financial crisis which is being felt since 2009, Turkey, as the 6th largest European economy, occupied the first place in Europe in terms of growth with a rate of 8.5 percent in 2011. Turkey also has intensive commercial and economic relations with the European Union. The EU is Turkish biggest trade and investment partner.<sup>25</sup> Turkey as a result of the increasingly critical stance of key players like France and Germany, which are skeptical of Turkey's credential as a European country and its ability to fulfill the accession criteria. Turkey has found a friend in the United Kingdom, who has been backing the entry of Turkey into the EU. The United Kingdom has always been wary of the friendship that had bloomed between France and Germany, as they were showing strong signs of dominance. In fact, Turkey already complied with a number of strict economic requirements, the Maastricht criteria, such as reducing the public debt below the threshold of 60 percent which is above 100 percent in some member countries and the budget deficit under the threshold of three percent which

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, in the case of several Sub-Saharan African countries, Afghanistan and Mongolia a gap between Turkey's share in the trade volume of the abovementioned states and the entire EU's share is gradually decreasing to a level of 1:4 in favour of the EU. This trend will probably continue in the coming years.

<sup>24</sup> European Parliament and the Council, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2012-2013

<sup>25</sup> Turkey-EU relations. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-the-european-union.en.mfa>

is hard to attain even for economic powerhouses such as Germany and France who are currently violating this critical criterion.

The Commission, in its progress report before the negotiation talks started in 2006, clearly mentioned that Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria, which aim at the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, the protection of minorities, and the existence of a functioning market economy. However, right after Turkey overcomes a barrier comes another demand no matter it is a fair one or it appears in membership requirements.

The EU should not only see Turkey as a candidate for accession but view Ankara as a significant potential asset for effective multilateralism. At the same time, Turkey should think beyond its accumulated frustrations with negotiations and seize the opportunity to couple its diplomatic activism with a strategic alliance with the EU (Grabbe, Ulgen). Over time, this engagement will strengthen the accession process by forging bonds at the working and political levels, and foster a common understanding of and approach to the many problems that both Turkey and the EU want to solve.

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