

Turkey: A Long Journey to Europe A Media Briefing



Basic facts:¹

Population: 69,660,559 (July 2005 est.)

GDP per capita, purchasing power parity: \$7,400 (2004 est.)

Population below poverty line: 20% (2002)

GDP by sector:

agriculture: 11.7%

industry: 29.8%

services: 58.5% (2003 est.)

Agricultural products: tobacco, cotton, grain, olives, sugar beets, citrus

Industrial products: textiles, food processing, automobiles, mining (coal, chromite, copper, boron), steel, petroleum, construction, lumber, paper

Export partners: Germany 13.9%, UK 8.8%, US 7.7%, Italy 7.4%, France 5.8%, Spain 4.2% (2004)

Import partners: Germany 12.9%, Russia 9.3%, Italy 7.1%, France 6.4%, US 4.8%, China 4.6%, UK 4.4% (2004)

¹ Map and estimates from CIA. *World Factbook*. 2004.



Historical Background

The beginning of modern Turkey

Once the center of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey as we know it today was established in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal. Kemal was later called Atatürk – father of the Turks. In the 1930s, under Kemal’s leadership, Turkey underwent a series of sweeping social, legal, and political reforms, including the abolition of Sharia (religious) law, the expansion of women’s rights, and the introduction of secular government, secularized education, and the Latin alphabet.

The role of the military

Following Kemal’s death in 1938, Turkish politicians attempted to build a democracy based on multi-party elections. Yet Turkish democracy has been persistently fractured by periods of instability and military rule. While military rule is traditionally associated with ruthless arbitrary terror, the Turkish military stands out as an exception in one important respect. It has a pronounced secular orientation and emphasizes the need to separate the state from religion. In fact, the military in Turkey stepped in to protect the fragile secular democracy from strong Islamist influences in 1960 and 1997. It also intervened to restore law and order in 1980, when violent clashes between the Turkish extreme Left and extreme Right forces lead to large-scale anarchy in the country. Overall, the military in Turkey has often acted as a guarantor of secular democracy.

Turkey: an important ally of the West

During the Cold War, Turkey was an important Western ally on the Balkan Peninsula and in the Middle East. Recently, Turkish military forces participated in the enforcement of the Northern no-fly zone of Iraq, following the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and in the 1999 NATO operations to enforce peace in Kosovo on the Balkan Peninsula. Although current Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is perceived to pursue a mild Islamist agenda, he remains committed to a close partnership with the US and a further secularization of reforms, given his country’s aspiration to join the European Union.

The bid to join the EU

Turkey’s aspiration to join the EU dates back to the 1960s. In 1963, Turkey and the European Community entered into an Association Agreement, which hinted at a possible future membership. In 1995, Turkey entered into a customs union with the EU, thus strengthening the economic cooperation between the two entities. In 1999, the Helsinki European Council granted Turkey the status of a candidate for accession. The June 2004 European Council in Brussels reaffirmed the prospect for future Turkish EU membership, provided that the country meets all EU accession criteria. Most recently, in October 2005, Turkey officially started negotiations for accession into the EU.

Current issues

At present, the Turkish government headed by Prime Minister Erdogan has to deal with a number of territorial disputes. For example, in 1974, Turkey established a garrison on the island of Cyprus in response to a Greek coup. The issue of the island's division into a Greek and a Turkish part is still unresolved. Furthermore, the separatist Kurdish organization People's Congress of Kurdistan also challenges Turkish authority in the Kurdistan region, which borders on Northern Iraq and is populated mainly by Kurdish minority. In addition, the frequent human rights abuses in Turkish prisons, the need to further expand women's rights, the vulnerable economy, and the persistent tension between Islamist and secular influences are all bound to make Turkey's journey to the EU a long and difficult one.

Is Turkey European?

From a purely geographical point of view, whether Turkey is a part of Europe is up for debate. Certainly, a small portion of the country is on the Balkan Peninsula, bordering on Greece and Bulgaria. However, most of Turkey is actually in the Middle East.

From a strategic point of view, Turkey is situated at a regional crossroads of considerable importance for Europe: the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The country is a transit route for land and air transport with Asia, and for sea transport with Russia and the Ukraine. Its neighbors provide key energy supplies for Europe.

Turkey's potential geopolitical influence also cannot be ignored. As a member of the EU, it would become the biggest Member State in terms of population. As a Muslim secular country with a functioning democracy, it could be a factor of stability in a traditionally volatile region.

Implications of Turkish Accession

Turkey's bid to join the EU is backed enthusiastically by a major political player – the USA. EU demands for reform have caused visible changes in Turkey's legal framework, along with improved treatment of minorities and women. An advantage of accession is the opportunity for increased economic growth both in the EU and Turkey. This advantage is offset by the huge cost of accepting Turkey in the Union, especially in terms of payments to its relatively backward agricultural sector. Turkey's geographical location has both positive and negative implications for EU stability and security. Its energy-rich neighbors are a strategic resource for the enlarged EU. However, extending the EU border to unstable countries such as Iraq and Syria poses important security challenges. Lastly, Turkey has the potential to strengthen European security and defense capabilities significantly, but it still has to demonstrate the political will to do so.

US support for accession

Turkey has strong economic, political, and military links with the United States. In the past, the US has been dependent on Turkey's military capabilities and strategic location for carrying out its agenda in the Middle East. The US government enthusiastically supports the Turkish bid to join the European Union. This enthusiasm manifests itself in the US emphasis of Turkey's role as a reliable factor of stability in a potentially explosive region.

Yet some European governments fear that Turkey might be a Trojan horse that could strengthen the British Atlanticist position of pursuing closer foreign policy links with the US, as opposed to a fostering a truly independent European foreign policy. For various reasons, in France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, serious doubts remain about admitting Turkey into the EU.

Legal reforms

Until now, the EU has required the candidate countries to accept its 80,000 pages of rules and regulations known as *acquis communautaire*, plus the so-called Copenhagen criteria, according to which a country should be a functioning democracy and market economy, respecting human rights and the rule of law.

As a consequence of its bid to join the EU, since 1999 Turkey has introduced major constitutional and legislative changes that have improved the quality of democracy in the country. In 2003 and 2004, the Turkish government passed nine reform packages that promoted a political culture of tolerance and democracy. These changes included a ban on the death penalty, a zero-tolerance policy towards torture in prisons, and a reduction of military interference in politics, education, and culture.

However, the EU still expects Turkey to align its legislation more closely with European standards, especially in areas such as the Law of Associations, the Penal Code, and the Law on Intermediate Courts of Appeal. If Turkey fails to comply with EU demands, the Union reserves the right to suspend entry negotiations due to "a serious and persistent breach of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law."²

Cultural change

Even though Ataturk introduced secular reforms in Turkey as early as the 1930s in order to create a more open society, the country has often been criticized for its alarming treatment of minorities and women. The sizeable Kurdish minority of 67 million has been repressed and systematically denied free expression. This situation started changing slowly in 1999 when Turkey was officially recognized as an EU candidate.

² European Commission. "Recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey's Progress Toward Accession." Brussels: 6 October 2004, p.9.

Following persistent EU demands for better minority rights, Turkish state television began broadcasting in Kurdish in 2004. In the same year, the government released four Kurdish activists from prison, including human rights award winner Leyla Zana, who had spent 10 years in jail after trials deemed unfair by the EU.³ Again under EU pressure, the governing Turkish Justice and Development party refrained from proposing the so-called Law on Adultery for parliamentary consideration. If approved, this law would criminalize adultery committed by women.⁴ A further challenge for the Turkish government is to protect women from domestic violence, which is widespread in the rural regions of the country.

Economic growth in the EU and Turkey

Overall, EU Member States' economies are expected to benefit from the accession of Turkey, albeit only slightly. Investment opportunities for EU companies would increase as a result of Turkey's participation in the common market. A possible increase in labor supply due to migration from Turkey could create additional growth in the EU.⁵

Turkey is expected to benefit substantially from joining the EU. Accession would boost Turkey's economic growth through increased trade with the EU, higher FDI inflows, and higher productivity growth, following the implementation of structural reforms required by the more competitive environment of the EU internal market. In spite of the significant stimulus which this growth would give to Turkish economic development, the catching-up process of Turkey's income levels with those in the EU is expected to take several decades.⁶

The cost of Turkey's accession

Based on the current EU framework, direct payments to Turkey could cost the EU about €9 billion annually after any transitional periods. In comparison, the ten new EU Member States from Eastern Europe will receive direct payments of about €7 billion per year after the end of the transition periods. Roughly speaking, admitting Turkey would cost the EU some €2 billion more than admitting the ten new Member States taken together.⁷

Turkish agriculture

Compared to previous EU candidates, Turkey is larger, poorer, and more populous. Agriculture is of key importance to Turkey, both in social and economic terms. About

³ Oana Lungescu. "Turkey's Unrequited EU Love." <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/3847373.stm>>.

⁴ Deutsche Welle. "Turkey Backs Down on Adultery Law." <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,1564,1328680,00.html>>.

⁵ European Commission. "Issues Arising from Turkey's Membership Perspective." Brussels: 6 October 2004, p.14.

⁶ Ibid., p.17.

⁷ Ibid., p.38.

half of Turkey's area is devoted to agriculture, but the competitiveness of this sector is not satisfactory. If Turkey joins the EU, the agricultural subsidies to Turkish farmers, estimated according to the current EU framework, will be a significant burden on the EU budget.⁸ Turkey also needs to implement better veterinary and food safety standards to be in line with EU requirements.

Change in the composition of EU institutions⁹

If Turkey is admitted into the EU under the present decision-making framework, the allocation of the European Parliament seats of current Member States will change significantly. In particular, the medium and large sized countries will have fewer seats. In the Council of the European Union, Turkey will have an important voice due to its large population, as the Council voting system takes population size into consideration. The impact of Turkey's accession on the composition of the European Commission will not be as significant. In general, some of the old Member States fear that so much decision-making power in the hands of a new Member State may have a negative impact on the development of the EU and the deepening of the integration processes.

Turkish boundaries: energy and border control

Energy is an issue of strategic interest to the EU. If Turkey joins the Union, it will have a major role in securing the energy supplies of the enlarged EU. Turkey borders on the most energy-rich regions on the planet. Thus, admitting Turkey would ensure European access to these key resources and their safe transportation within the EU single market. It would also diversify the current EU supply lines. Turkey is expected to develop further as a major oil transit country when the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline comes into operation, in addition to its existing Bosphorus and the Northern Iraq-Ceyhan pipelines.

Turkey's accession to the European Union would significantly lengthen the Union's external boundaries. The management of the new border would constitute an important policy challenge and require significant investment. Some current Member States fear that Turkey cannot deal adequately with important issues such as: managing migration and asylum; fighting organized crime and terrorism; and preventing the trafficking of human beings, drugs, and weapons.

With Turkey in the Union, the land border of the EU would extend to unstable neighbors such as Iraq, Iran, and Syria. In order to ensure its own security, Turkey already devotes 64,000 people to border management.¹⁰ As of 2005, Turkey has taken the first steps towards aligning its border management legislation and practices with EU demands. However, many aspects of Turkish border control are still not in line with EU practices and would necessitate change before accession could take place.

⁸ Ibid., p.34.

⁹ For an overview of the EU institutions see "The European Union at a Glance."
<http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/index_en.htm>.

¹⁰ European Commission. "Issues Arising from Turkey's Membership Perspective." p.42.

European security and defense

With its large military expenditure and manpower, Turkey has the capacity to contribute significantly to the provision of security and defense in the EU. The Turkish defense budget is among the highest in NATO, accounting for 2.59 per cent of Turkish GDP in 2004. In addition, Turkey boasts military personnel of 793,000, which constitutes 27 per cent of the forces of NATO's European members.¹¹

Turkey is keen on asserting an independent national position on various issues, including Iraq, the Caucasus, and human rights in Muslim countries. This position sometimes differs from that of the EU. Overall, Turkey has the capacity to make major contributions to European security and defense policies, but its political ability and willingness to do so still have to be demonstrated in practice.

Conclusion

Unlike many of its Middle Eastern neighbors, Turkey has established a record of aspiring to democratic rule. It has an urban elite pushing for Westernizing reforms, and a young population that could contribute to resolving the EU demographic challenges in future decades. Certainly, political, cultural, and economic adjustments will be necessary if Turkey wants to integrate fully in the EU and be respected as a valuable member of the Union. These transformations will not take place overnight; they can only result from a genuine willingness to change on behalf of Turkey and a wise integration policy on behalf of the EU. Both sides have taken the first steps towards accession, but the final result of the negotiation process remains to be seen.

¹¹ European Commission. "Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Toward Accession." Brussels: 6 October 2004, p.11.