

## Turkey's Road to European Union Membership

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**Abstract:** The possibility of Turkey to become member of the European Union has raised numerous debates and concerns. Even the founding principle of *unity in diversity* seems to be challenged by the possibility of Turkish accession as this country possesses several features that are different from the rest of EU member states. Opinions related to Turkey EU membership are often divergent, each side relying on their own arguments. Proponents argue that Turkey is a regional power with a large economy and a strong military force that will enhance EU's position as a global geostrategic player. On the other hand, opponents emphasize the demographic projections which indicate that, in around ten years, Turkey will become EU's most populous state. They also draw attention upon Turkey's different cultural and religious background. **Objectives:** This paper is focused on revealing key-aspects of EU-Turkey relations in the context of accession negotiations. Furthermore, the paper presents the image of Turkey as a candidate country, emphasizing the opinion of officials but also the view of citizens, both from the European Union and Turkey. **Approach:** The paper is based on reviewing and analysis of existing research on the topic, including web-based documentation, statistics, press reports, EU reports.

**Keywords:** Turkey, candidate country, accession negotiations, European Union enlargement

### 1. Introduction

Ever since the foundation of the Turkish modern state in 1923, this country with a predominantly Muslim population has set as a foreign policy objective to reach a close alignment to the West. Turkey was a founding member of the United Nations (UN) and joined the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, being also a member of the Council of Europe in 1949 and of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1961. In 1959, Ankara decided to start a close cooperation with the European Economic Community and in 1963 Turkey signed an association agreement, thus becoming participant in a customs union.

The pro-western orientation and also its affiliation to important European organizations served Turkey as a support for its European vocation. Nevertheless, ever since Turkey's first official request in 1987, the perspective of Turkey

becoming an EU member state with full rights gave birth to endless discussions and debates. The European Union proved to be torn between two main orientations: a minimalist orientation, which was in favor of giving Turkey a special status in the relation with the European Union, but not the status of full-membership and the maximalist approach which insisted to give Turkey full-membership, the same status received by the other EU member states. (Păun N, Păun A.C., Ciceo, Albu-Comănescu, 2005, pp. 374-377)

## **2. Overview and Key Facts about Turkey**

The Republic of Turkey is a Eurasian country that has its territory on two continents: 97% in Asia and 3% in Europe. Turkey has around 73 085 000 inhabitants, around 80% of which are Turks and the rest of 20% are Kurds. Officially, the Republic of Turkey is a secular state. Around 99% of the population belongs to the Sunni branch<sup>1</sup> of Islam.

Modern Turkey appeared after the First World War, on the territory occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Under the rule of Mustafa Kemal, also known as Atatürk (the Father of Turks), Turkey went through modernization measures, such as:

- Republicanism - the removal of imperial, ottoman elements;
- Secularism - European languages are introduced in the national curriculum, European apparel becomes compulsory, the Constitution is modified and the article mentioning that Islam is the state religion was abrogated; the Constitution from 1937 includes provisions related to the secular character of Turkey.
- Turkization - the attempt to create a new identity, the linguistic reform that removed the non-Turk elements from the language, the policy of Turkization directed towards ethnic minorities.
- Populism - the development of the educational network, the improvement of women condition in the society. (Brusanowski, 2005, pp. 194-199)

Unlike its southern neighbors rich in oil, Ankara has important water supplies and arable lands. Turkey's economy had been seriously affected by crises in 1999 and also in 2001. Ankara received support from the International Monetary Fund but had to apply several structural reforms in return. The possible EU accession also requires deep structural reforms.

European Union member states represent Turkey's main commercial partners. On the other hand, Turkey plays an essential role in the application of hydrocarbon

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<sup>1</sup> A difference is to be made between Islamic denominations: Sunni Islam and Shia Islam. About 85% of the Muslims are Sunni and they practice a moderate form of Islamic interpretation. The Shi'ites represent about 15% of the Muslim world and they are commonly met in Iran, southern Iraq and southern Lebanon. Unlike the Sunni, the Shi'ites have an increased hierarchical structure of the clergy. In addition, the Shi'ites are more literal in Qur'an interpretation and application and they are also more militant than the Sunni.

transportation projects from Central Asia and Middle East to Europe, especially to European Union countries.

Turkey's political system is characterized by the important role of the army, who is also the pillar of the secular state and the protector of the Turkish state against external threats. From an official perspective, Turkey has the structure of a parliamentary democracy. The Islamic movement revived in 1989, mostly as a consequence of Turkey's rapid modernization. The president of Turkey is Abdullah Gül, elected in 2007 for a five-year term. The government is formed by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Prime Minister is Recep Tayyip Erdogan. This political system is contested by series of radical and terrorist groups, mainly by Islamist or Kurdish organizations. (Frunzeti & Zodian, 2007, pp. 463-470)

From a geopolitical point of view Turkey has been considered a pivotal state. Situated at the crossroads of civilizations, religions and commercial routes, Turkey can influence the situation from other countries, located thousands of miles away from the Bosphorus. Consequently, the problems of Turkey have an increased importance: the internal problems such as demographic pressures, ethnic rivalries, the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, but most of all, the external problems. Among the latter, several issues can be underlined: rivalry with Greece, born from the control problem over Cyprus, controversies with Syria related to navigation on the Euphrates, conflicts with Iraq fuelled by the Kurdish problem. (Dobrescu, 2003, pp. 342-343)

In the book *The Grand Chessboard*, first published in 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski states that geopolitical pivotal states are often designated by their geographical position which gives them a special role, allowing them to ensure access to certain important areas or empowering them to refuse access to resources. Pivotal states can serve as a shield for a state or even for a region. Turkey is a middle size power, with strong regional aspirations and which is aware of its historical significance. Turkey ensures stability in the Black Sea region, controls the access from this direction to the Mediterranean, still offers an antidote to Muslim fundamentalism and serves as a southern support point for NATO. (Brzezinski, 2000, p. 53, p. 60, p. 151)

Brzezinski also considers that Turkey is "a post imperial state still in the process of redefining its identity, pulled in three directions: the modernists would like to see it become a European state and thus look to the west; the Islamists lean in the direction of the Middle East and a Muslim community and thus look to the south; and the historically minded nationalists see in the Turkic peoples of the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia a new mission for a regionally dominant Turkey and thus look eastward." (Brzezinski, 2000, p. 151)

### 3. Turkey and the Cyprus Problem

Cyprus gained independence from Britain in 1960. Three years later, violence broke out between the Greek community and the Turk community, which in 1974 led to a Greek attempt to seize power and to Turkey's military intervention. In 1983, the northern part of the island, held by Turks proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" which is recognized by Turkey alone. The island remained divided ever since, despite constant efforts conducted by UN and aimed at bringing Greek and Turk communities to the negotiations table.<sup>1</sup>

A UN reunification plan was very close to become successful in 2004. In 2003, Kofi Annan, UN general secretary, presented plans for a unified federal state, composed of two parts and having two communities. This so-called „Annan plan" was approved at the voting organized at the end of 2003 in the Turkish-held side of the island. At the beginning of the year 2004, Günther Verheugen, former Enlargement Commissioner, hoped that he had convinced Cypriot leaders to accept the UN plan. He was also hoping that this plan would become legitimate after a referendum that was going to take place before Cyprus accession to the European Union. Nevertheless, the main political actors from the Greek side of the island opposed the plan, sustaining that UN didn't offer them enough security warranties. The president of Cyprus was also against this plan. On 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2004, 76% of Greek Cypriots voted against UN reunification plan. The proposed agreement was also criticized because it allowed Turks, which represent around 18% of the Cypriot population to keep 29% of the island. (Gallagher, 2006, pp. 39-40)

In an article published in 2009 in *The Economist*, two problems are outlined regarding the Cyprus problem: "At any time, one side wants to settle but the other doesn't; and both sides treat them (wrongly) as a zero-sum game."<sup>2</sup>

Brussels wants Turkey to recognize the Republic of Cyprus but this idea was rejected by Turk leaders who insist that they will only recognize a state based on partnership, established as a result of peace talks. Cyprus being an EU member state it consequently has a veto right and thus it can adopt a strict position during the negotiations with Turkey. The condition for Turkey to open its ports for Greek Cypriots is part of an agreement signed in 1995 with the European Community. Instead, Turkey conditioned this movement on the obligation of EU to take measures in order to diminish Turks Cypriots isolation, whose separatist republic has no international status.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Turkey accession and Cyprus*, retrieved from: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/turkey-accession-cyprus/article-135940>

<sup>2</sup> *Aphrodite's troubled island*, retrieved from: <http://www.economist.com/node/15073982>

<sup>3</sup> *Problema Ciprului ar putea bloca procesul de aderare a Turciei la UE*, retrieved from: [http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles%7CdisplayArticle/articleID\\_15933/Problema-Ciprului-ar-putea-bloca-procesul-de-aderare-a-Turciei-la-UE.html](http://www.euractiv.ro/uniunea-europeana/articles%7CdisplayArticle/articleID_15933/Problema-Ciprului-ar-putea-bloca-procesul-de-aderare-a-Turciei-la-UE.html)

#### 4. Turkey and the Kurdish Issue

Internal tensions regarding the Kurds began since the first years of the Republic. Kurds represent around 20% of the population, around half of which live in the big cities from the west of Turkey, and another part represent a majority in the poor south-east part of the country. The Kurdish issue represents more than economic underdevelopment or separatist terror. It concerns the following difficult question: how can a multi-ethnic state be political organized without affecting its unity?

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)<sup>1</sup> has initiated a series of actions against Ankara government in order to control the Turkish Kurdistan. The Turkish army riposted and launched a long term campaign in eastern Turkey, northern Syria and Iraq in order to annihilate PKK. In 1999, after PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan was arrested, a truce was concluded. At Western suggestion, Turkey abolished death penalty and gave cultural autonomy to Kurds. In the Kurdish issue, EU insists for a complete democratization of the country and recognition of minorities rights.

In the Enlargement Strategy issued in 2010, the European Commission considers that the "democratic opening" of Turkey, which was aimed notably at addressing the Kurdish issue has produced only limited results. "The security situation in South-East has worsened, with a resurgence of attacks by the terrorist organization PKK/Kongra-Gel."<sup>2</sup>

#### 5. EU Accession Requirements

EU membership is based on the principle that each member state must follow prescriptions and measures indicated by the European Union. This set of laws, called *acquis communautaire*<sup>3</sup>, is not negotiable. Several transitive legislative regulations, temporarily implemented and firmly motivated, are negotiable. (Busek, E. & Mikulitsch, W., 2005, p. 104)

Turkey fulfillment of accession conditions is controlled through the 35 negotiation chapters and negotiation progress is established in accordance to the Copenhagen criteria which contain the following requirements:

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<sup>1</sup> PKK is a militant Kurdish nationalist organization. Although the group initially declared its intention to establish an independent Kurdish state (that would have included northern Iraq and certain parts of Iran and Syria), its aims were later tempered to calls for greater Kurdish autonomy. Retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325238/Kurdistan-Workers-Party-PKK> There are countries, for example USA, who label PKK as a terrorist organization.

<sup>2</sup> *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011*, 09.11.2010, pp. 18-19, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press\\_corner/key-documents/reports\\_nov\\_2010\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2010_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The *acquis* is "the body of common rights and obligations that is binding on all the Member States of the European Union". It comprises the content of the Treaties, EU legislation, declarations and resolutions, international agreements. Information retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/glossary/terms/acquis\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/glossary/terms/acquis_en.htm)

- stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
- the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.<sup>1</sup>

Turkey must also prove its administrative capacity to transpose EU legislation into national legislation, to correctly apply this legislation and express its engagement to respect it. Other prerequisites for Turkish EU accession are Turkey's commitment to maintain good relations with its neighbors, its determination for peaceful solving of border related conflicts and also the fulfillment of obligations provided in the Ankara Association Agreement and in the Additional Protocol.

## 6. Turkey's Relation with the European Union

Political and economical reasons determined Ankara to request integration in the Economic Community in 1987. Brussels Commission was against this demand in 1989, especially as a consequence of the criticism targeting the authoritarian regime and the tensions between Greece and Turkey. A customs union links Turkey and European Union since 1996, but Turkey considers this agreement as an unsatisfactory substitute for the status of full-fledged member state. In 1999 Turkey received the status of candidate country. Turkey is also a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue, an initiative of the European Union that aims to stabilize Middle East and North Africa and to create a free-trade area. (Frunzeti & Zodian, 2007, p. 469)

Accession negotiations with Turkey were postponed until the beginning of October 2005 because Turkey did not fulfill the Copenhagen political criteria. The decision to launch accession negotiations was also questioned by the direct opposition of Austria, which wanted to give Turkey the status of privileged partner instead. (Păun N. *et alii*, 2005, p. 376)

## 7. Accession Negotiations with Turkey

The framework of accession negotiations with Turkey was adopted by the European Council in 2005 and possesses several features. First of all, although the common objective of negotiations is accession, the outcome of negotiations remains open and cannot be guaranteed in advance. The European Union has created a gateway from the negotiations by imposing its integration capacity as an accession criterion: "the EU must be able to integrate new members: it needs to

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<sup>1</sup> *Accession criteria*, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accession\\_process/criteria/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/criteria/index_en.htm)

ensure that its institutions and decision-making processes remain effective and accountable; it needs to be in a position, as it enlarges, to continue developing and implementing common policies in all areas; and it needs to be in a position to continue financing its policies in a sustainable manner.”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, if required, the European Union reserves the right of imposing long transition periods, derogations, specific arrangements and safeguard clauses. Additionally, Turkey’s accession will not be possible before 2014, when a new framework for financial arrangements is expected to be introduced.

The Lisbon Treaty, entered into force in December 2009 does not explicitly quote the membership criteria, but reference is made to them in the amendment made to article 49 of the Treaty on European Union: “The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account.”<sup>2</sup> Candidate states must respect the “values” of the European Union: respect of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities. The candidate state addresses its request to the Council, which decides unanimously. The candidate state has also to inform the European Parliament and the National Parliaments, but they play no role in the accession procedure however. The Council decides unanimously.<sup>3</sup>

Arguments brought by Turkey to support its candidacy are the strategic position of the country, the dimension of the market and the counterattack against Muslim fundamentalism. On the other hand, there are voices who claim that Turkey finds itself in the delicate situation of not having other foreign policy viable alternatives to EU accession as a consequence of the constraints imposed by internal political problems. (Păun N. *et alii*, 2005, p. 377)

In his book, *The Balkans in the New Millennium*, Tom Gallagher argues that Turkey is the most dynamic country from its region, having a dual geographical identity. If Turkey becomes the new south-eastern border of the European Union it may contribute to the stabilization of the Balkans which will no longer be a periphery that generates problems. Under these circumstances, it will most probably be difficult to resist against pressures for EU membership request, coming from states that belonged to Former Yugoslavia. Croatia is already a beneficiary of its opening towards Turkey. (Gallagher, 2006, p. 12)

In a report entitled *Turkey and Europe: the decisive year ahead*, issued in 2008, International Crisis Group, a non-governmental organization committed to

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<sup>1</sup> *Conditions for Enlargement*, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/the-policy/conditions-for-enlargement/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/the-policy/conditions-for-enlargement/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> *Official Journal of the European Union C306, Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007*, p.40

<sup>3</sup> *Understanding the Lisbon Treaty, Sheet 9: The Lisbon Treaty and the enlargement policy*, retrieved from <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/tout-comprendre-sur-le-traite-de-lisbonne.php?lang=en>

preventing and resolving deadly conflict, draws attention upon several aspects related to Turkey. According to International Crisis Group, EU must frequently and firmly restate the fact that Turkey can obtain full-membership provided that it fulfills all necessary criteria. The recommendations made for EU by International Crisis Group contain also the following advice: “EU must take a greater, even-handed interest in Cyprus settlement talks; send senior officials to visit both community leaders in their offices on the island; underline willingness to give financial support for a solution; and consider delaying oil exploration in contested territorial waters while talks are under way.” Regarding the Kurds, the report contains the following recommendations for the Turkish government: “Broaden the policy of inclusion towards the Turkish Kurds by both sustaining economic development plans in Kurdish-majority areas and developing wider cultural and language rights.”<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group also recommends that Turkey should continue the reforms requested by the EU, at the highest level of commitment, also emphasizing the need for reestablishment of trust and cooperation between parliamentary political parties.

Related to Turkey’s efforts in the preparation for EU accession, in November 2008, Olli Rehn, former European Commissioner for Enlargement criticized the limited scale of reforms and appealed to a more constructive approach of the Cyprus issue. Olli Rehn stated that good neighborhood relations continue to be essential and reminded Turkey’s responsibility to refrain from obstructing the efforts of Cyprus reunification. Former Enlargement Commissioner praised the modifications brought to the notorious article 301<sup>2</sup> from the Turkish Penal Code, related to the reducing of punishment for criticizing Turkey’s identity but also mentioned that further efforts are needed in order to ensure a better protection of fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression. Furthermore, the European Commission requested that Turkey speeds up its efforts to promote women rights and gender equality by adapting legislation to European standards. Olli Rehn also confirmed that Turkey’s greatest achievements have been registered in the economic field. Despite structural weaknesses and the relatively new macro-economical stability, economic indicators improved sufficiently and Turkey is considered to have a functional market economy.

Since February 2010, with a four-year term, the Enlargement Commissioner position is held by Štefan Füle. In September 2010 he welcomed the outcome of Turkey’s referendum on constitutional changes but he also stated that Turkey must speed up change in the area of fundamental rights. The September 12<sup>th</sup> referendum

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<sup>1</sup> *Turkey and Europe: The decisive year ahead*, Crisis Group Europe Report no 197, 15 December 2008, p. 18, retrieved from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/turkey-cyprus/turkey/197-turkey-and-europe-the-decisive-year-ahead.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Article 301 from the Turkish Penal Code is a controversial article which made it illegal to insult Turkey, the Turkish ethnicity, or Turkish government institutions. Article 301 was amended in 2008, in order to prevent it from being a severe threat to freedom of expression.



contains reforms which will further erode the generals' influence and will increase democratic control over the courts.<sup>1</sup> Štefan Füle also expressed his opinion that a new civilian Constitution would sustain further development of democracy in Turkey, in line with European standards and the EU accession criteria. Moreover, future constitutional changes should be based upon dialogue and consultation, with the involvement of all political parties and civil society.<sup>2</sup>

At present, there are 12 chapters of negotiations opened (Enterprise and industrial policy, Financial Control, Statistics, Trans-European networks, Consumer and health protection, Environment, Intellectual property rights, Company law, Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, Free movement of capital, Information society and media, Taxation), out of 35 chapters and only one chapter – Science and Research, has been provisionally closed in June 2006. Other eight chapters are frozen as a result of Turkey's obstructive position towards Cyprus reunification talks. The eight chapters are: Free Movement of Goods, Right of Establishment and Freedom to Provide Services, Financial Services, Agriculture and Rural Development, Fisheries, Transport Policy, Customs Union and External Relations.<sup>3</sup> In February 2008, the Council adopted a new revised Accession Partnership with Turkey, which indicates the priority areas for Turkey's membership preparation, also being a basis for future political reforms and a useful instrument, helping Turkey to measure the progress achieved.

In November 2010, the Commission adopted its annual Enlargement Strategy for the following year, which comprises its policy on EU enlargement. Among other issues approached, the document includes a summary of the progress made over the last year by Turkey. According to the Enlargement Strategy, Turkey has continued its political reform process and amended the constitution, introducing key reforms which „limit the competence of military courts; broaden trade union rights in the public sector; provide the basis for the adoption of special measures protecting the rights of women and children; guarantee protection of personal data; and grant the right to apply to an ombudsman, thus providing the legal basis for the establishment of the ombudsman institution.”<sup>4</sup>

The Enlargement Strategy emphasizes the need for proper implementation of the reforms through relevant legislation, drawing attention on other particular areas that need to be strengthened, such as freedom of expression and of the media, freedom of religion, women's rights and trade union rights.

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<sup>1</sup> *Turkey's referendum, Erdogan wins again*, retrieved from [http://www.economist.com/node/17046653?story\\_id=17046653](http://www.economist.com/node/17046653?story_id=17046653)

<sup>2</sup> *EU-Turkey relations*, retrieved from <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations-links dossier-188294>

<sup>3</sup> *EU-Turkey relations*, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/turkey/relation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/turkey/relation/index_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011*, 09.11.2010, p. 18, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press\\_corner/key-documents/reports\\_nov\\_2010\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2010_en.htm)

Regarding the Cyprus problem, the Commission considers that Turkey has not progressed towards normalization of bilateral relations with the Republic of Cyprus. For instance, Turkey has not removed all obstacles to the free movement of goods with Cyprus. The Commission urges Turkey to make progress in this direction.

Another important area of interest is the need to solve open bilateral issues, including border disputes. Turkey is required to improve relations with Greece, as complaints were made by the latter about violations of its airspace and territorial waters by Turkey.

### **8. Opponents of Turkey's Accession to the European Union**

Austria, Germany and France are the main states that expressed their opposition regarding Turkey's accession to the European Union. Those who are against Turkey's accession argue that Turkey is a "Christian club", thus using an expression initially introduced by Jacques Delors and made popular by Valery Giscard d'Estaing. Those who are against Turkey's accession also make use of the following argument: having Turkey as an EU member state, possibly with the most numerous population among all member states, could lead to a diluted EU identity. Turkey as a new massive member state, with deep cultural differences would be difficult to absorb even by a more flexible Union. The danger of Islamic fundamentalism is also outlined by those who oppose Turkey's accession. (Gallagher, 2006, pp. 306-307)

A firm, negative opinion against Turkey's accession is stated by the French journalist and political commentator Alain Duhamel: "Turkey was recognized at the Helsinki Summit from mid 1999 as a candidate country, with juridical rights, a fact which is a historical nonsense and a dangerous precedent. It is true that Turkey is the most secular Muslim state, the heir of the Ottoman Empire and has a crucial position strategically speaking. Not for religious reasons but from an obvious geographical reason: 95% of its territory belongs to the Middle East. Then why not the Muslim republics from Central Asia, Maghreb states or Israel? Why not Eurasia or Eurafrika?" (Dobrescu, 2003, p. 136)

Germany is also critical of Turkish EU-membership. Chancellor Angela Merkel said that "accession is not a one-way street" and she also expressed her preference for a privileged partnership with Turkey, rather than full-membership. French President Nicolas Sarkozy also expressed the same view, suggesting that EU should suspend negotiations with Turkey and instead prepare for a privileged partnership.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *EU-Turkey relations*, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations-links dossier-188294>

The negative opinions expressed by several EU member states regarding Turkey's accession have led to the increase of eurosceptic views among the Turks. National surveys showed that in 2008 only 55% of the Turks considered their country's accession as a positive outcome, compared to 80% in 2005. (*Lumea*, 2008, pp. 16-17)

### **9. Proponents of Turkey's Accession to the European Union**

Those who are in favor of Turkey's EU-membership reply that differences between this state and the other EU member states are being exaggerated. According to proponents, due to a long modernization process, Turkey's society has a strong secular structure. Islam role resembles more with the situation from Bosnia, a country from the Balkans, and less with the particularities from Egypt or Iran. In their view, Turkey is a leading regional power that had a stabilizing influence on the hotspots from the periphery of Europe, the Caucasus, Middle East and Central Asia. They believe that Turkey acted like a bridge between Europe and the tumultuous Middle East and that economic advantages weigh more than disadvantages. The advocates of Turkish accession emphasize other strengths, such as: education standards improve on a constant basis, a better trained workforce emerges, and this could be used by the European Union in order to enhance its competitiveness. (Gallagher, 2006, pp. 306-307)

The United Kingdom continues to be a strong supporter of Turkish EU membership. In a speech held at the Turkish parliament in Ankara, UK Prime Minister David Cameron said that Turkey is "vital for our economy, vital for our security and vital for our diplomacy". In his opinion, a European Union without Turkey at its heart is "not stronger but weaker... not more secure but less... not richer but poorer".<sup>1</sup>

Italy is also an advocate of Turkish EU accession. President Giorgio Napolitano stresses that "Turkey represents an added value for Europe. It is necessary to continue negotiations for entry without unnecessary obstructionism."<sup>2</sup>

### **10. Turkey - a Muslim country**

Turkey is a Muslim country and this reality is one of the greatest concerns of those who doubt the benefits of Turkish accession to the European Union. Generally speaking, western perception about Islam is vague and mainly negative, the Islamic world being seen as conservative, less receptive to contemporary development,

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<sup>1</sup> *Cameron 'anger' at slow pace of Turkish EU negotiations*, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-10767768>

<sup>2</sup> *EU-Turkey relations*, retrieved from <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations-links dossier-188294>

crossed by different fundamentalist orientations and movements which resort to violence. (Dobrescu, 2003, p. 330)

A suggestive concept which combines negative stereotypes towards Islam is *islamophobia*, a concept that expresses fear or even hate directed at Islam, Muslims or Islamic culture. The British Runnymede organization, whose aim is to promote a successful multi-ethnic British society, has identified several particular features of islamophobia, such as:

- Islam is seen as a monolithic block, which does not respond to change.
- Islam is seen separately, as the “other”; it has no common values with other cultures.
- Islam is perceived as being inferior to the Western world. It is considered barbarian, primitive, irrational.
- Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supporter of terrorism and involved in a “clash of civilizations”.<sup>1</sup>

These negative perceptions about the Muslim world can affect Turkey’s accession chances, especially if countries like France or Austria will organize referenda on the issue of Turkish EU accession.

### **11. Citizens’ Position towards Turkey’s EU Membership**

The outcome of the Eurobarometer 69 on the issue of The European Union today and tomorrow published in November 2008 showed that only 31% of Europeans are in favor of Turkey’s accession to the European Union, meanwhile 55% are against. In the possible situation of Turkey’s accession criteria fulfillment, 45% of respondents are in favor of Turkey’s accession and a similar percent against. Citizens from countries like Sweden, Netherlands, Romania or Denmark declare mostly in favor of Turkey’s membership. On the other hand, citizens from Austria, Luxemburg, France and Germany oppose Turkey’s accession.<sup>2</sup>

According to surveys conducted in April 2008, citizens from Turkey believe their country should join the European Union. 41.9 % of respondents support Turkey’s accession into the continental group, up 9.8 points since 2006.<sup>3</sup>

In a Flash Eurobarometer survey on the *Views on European Union enlargement* conducted in February 2009 in the 27 member states of the European Union, respondents were asked to choose the two main issues that EU should take into account in case it would consider to accept new members. The first issues

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<sup>1</sup> *Islamophobia: a definition*, retrieved from: <http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-a-definition/>

<sup>2</sup> *Eurobarometer 69, The European Union today and tomorrow*, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69\\_part3\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_part3_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: [http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/31593/support\\_for\\_eu\\_accession\\_increases\\_in\\_turkey/](http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/31593/support_for_eu_accession_increases_in_turkey/)

considered prior to further EU enlargement are freedom and democratic values and the economic issues. The following issues, in the respective order in which they were chosen by respondents are: immigration issues, cultural and religious issues, stability at EU's borders, EU's role in the world and the ageing of European population.<sup>1</sup>

The Eurobarometer 72 on the *Public Opinion in the European Union* conducted in October-November 2009, in the EU-27 and in the candidate countries, shows that 50% of respondents from Turkey believe that their country would benefit from European Union membership. The expectation of benefits from future EU membership has fallen sharply in the last period, declining from 57% to 50%. Regarding the issue of trust in the EU, 48% of Europeans say that they tend to trust the EU, whereas 40% tend not to trust it. In Turkey, only 33% of respondents trust the EU. Another aspect analyzed in this Eurobarometer is the issue of further EU enlargement. The highest scores in favor of further enlargement are recorded in Poland (70%), Slovakia (70%), Slovenia (68%) and the Czech Republic (63%). On the other hand, respondents from Austria (65%), France (60%), Germany (60%), Finland (55%), the United Kingdom (55%), Luxembourg (54%), Belgium (53%), the Netherlands (51%) and Denmark (50%) oppose further enlargement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 257, *Views on European Union Enlargement, Analytical Report*, p. 36, retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/flash\\_arch\\_269\\_255\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/flash_arch_269_255_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Eurobarometer 72, Autumn 2009, *Public Opinion in the European Union*, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_en.htm)

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