

## **Turkey and EU membership: a win-win situation**

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The founding fathers of Europe were convinced that they had to define common interests and shared perspectives in order to overcome a culture of hatred and mistrust.

.In this process, they did not make a reference to religious belief or even to secular cultural notions and values. Neither the geographical nor the philosophical, cultural and religious affiliations were parts of the membership criteria and have never been a part of European history.

Any European state respecting the European values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on the EU and committed to promoting them can become a member of the EU in accordance with Article 49 of the aforementioned Treaty. In that sense membership for the countries embracing European values and promoting common interests should not be subject to any other consideration or criterion.

Enlargement is, first and foremost, a political goal of the EU aiming at consolidating peace and stability for the benefit of all across the continent. It is also an instrument for extending the borders of European values. Through enlargement, the EU expands not only geographically but also politically, economically, culturally and socially. Enlargement is a mechanism that serves directly the emergence of the EU as a global power.

After 50 years devoted to both deepening and widening efforts, it is time for the EU to choose whether it will be an "assertive global actor" or an "irrelevant Western peninsula on the Asian continent" - in the words of one recent EU reflection Group.

When all these aspects are taken into consideration and if prejudices and domestic politics are put aside, the emerging picture will reveal that Europe's interest in Turkey's membership is no smaller than Turkey's interest in joining the bloc.

From an economic point of view, the advantages of such accession are remarkable and can be summarized in few words: "legislative harmony ... new markets ... commercial opportunities and investment potentials."

The economic crisis, which is changing the economic climate and the architecture of the world economy, also shows that Turkey's accession offers considerable economic opportunities for the EU.

World Bank statistics indicate that Turkey is the 16th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest in Europe. According to the OECD, Turkey is expected to be the fastest growing economy of the OECD and Europe in the forthcoming period, and will be the second highest growth country by 2017. Turkey is also among countries expected to provide the necessary stimulus for economic recovery in the world.

Today, Turkey is the EU's 7th biggest trade partner and the EU is Turkey's main trading partner. Turkey is also the only country which has formed a Customs Union with the EU well before its accession.

## **Window of opportunity**

According to the UN, Turkey has entered into a period of a "demographic window of opportunity" which is expected to continue until the mid 21st century. Its young, well-educated and highly skilled labour force can be a remedy for the structural deficiencies of the EU stemming from its aging population.

Thanks to its large and growing domestic market, its mature and dynamic private sector, its leading role in the region, its liberal and secure investment environment, the supply of a high quality and cost-effective labour force, as well as developed infrastructure and an institutionalised economy, Turkey would bring considerable economic gains for the EU.

With its fast-growing economy, Turkey appeases all concerns that it would be burden on the EU budget. On the contrary, it would help the EU in achieve a competitive advantage against emerging markets in Asia and America.

As has been said by various experts, having Turkey as a member would also make a significant contribution to promoting EU values abroad.

Turkey is a member and in certain cases even a founding member of numerous international organizations with an agenda-setting and decision-making role - the Council of Europe, the OECD, the OSCE and Nato. Turkey, within these organizations, aspires to act in support of democracy, stability, solidarity and prosperity for the benefit of all. Its membership in the G20 shows the geostrategic role that it can play in the international arena.

Moreover, 70 percent of the world's energy resources are located to the south and east of Turkey, while the world's largest energy consumer, Europe, is located to the west of Turkey. Turkey's central geographical position is also critical for the security and sustainability of energy supply to the EU - a vital condition for almost any economic activity.

Its location makes Turkey a key strategic ally of the EU. Its close historic ties and recent experiences in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and Southern Mediterranean, furnish Turkey with the necessary assets to make positive contributions to the shaping of EU policies toward these crucial and sensitive regions.

## **Common destiny**

As former French President Jacques Chirac said: "The European Union and Turkey share a common destiny." In reaffirming this common destiny, we aim to prove that dialogue between the Orient and the Occident is possible, and that dialogue with Islam is not only feasible but also profitable and fruitful. Does not Europe count 15-20 million Muslims among its citizens?

Our common destiny is also evident in our shared concern to promote peace in the world. Turkey symbolises the possibility of a country to transform its society, economy and politics, and to make itself a strong and democratic regional actor. Turkey - a democratic and secular country as described by Prime Minister Erdogan - is increasingly seen by several southern Mediterranean countries as a source of inspiration for democratic transition.

The rise of xenophobia, racism, prejudices against certain religions and identities today threaten humanity in many ways. As an EU member Turkey, with its rich historical and cultural heritage, as well as its multi-faceted identity resulting from its geographical position as a bridge between western and eastern cultures, would bring the EU closer to the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Turkey's geostrategic location allows it to help create a more secure and stable environment for the citizens of the EU and for the world as a whole. Turkey's membership to the EU would provide the Union with leverage for its ambition of becoming a global power.

However, the slow pace of accession negotiations since the unanimous recognition of Turkey's candidacy - in 1999 by the European Council - is disappointing. The frustration it generates is threatening the EU's credibility. It is time to display strategic and visionary leadership.

Since 2001, Turkish democracy has undergone profound changes. The parliament has passed hundreds of laws and regulations in the last decade. These changes are being made on behalf of human dignity, social justice, freedom and democracy. The EU should encourage these efforts, not evade its commitments.

## **Unity in diversity**

The European ideal aims to bring together the divergences of the European nations to create a new dynamism and synergy. The European Union's so-called motto, as well as its genuine ideal - and maybe its main challenge - is to make real "unity in diversity." If European nations are indeed "united in diversity", the accession of Turkey cannot be regarded as a threat but only as a promise, a promise of a more powerful, more prosperous and more capable Europe.

In order to achieve its objectives, the EU must maintain its credibility. It must respect the values it advocates and act accordingly. In that vein the Union should demonstrate that it remains committed towards accession and that it assesses each candidate country and its progress on its own merits and as regards its compliance with membership criteria.

A credible, rational and capable European Union should reassess its handling of the accession talks with Turkey and adopt a firm but fair approach towards this accession country whose significance and weight in global politics are increasing constantly. Such an approach will assist in demonstrating that the European Union is still capable of constructing a vision for the future of a united Europe as well as a vision for shaping the future of the world.

Turkey's contribution to the EU in a number of crucial areas will only be fully effective with an active and credible accession process.

### **Time for action**

As pointed out by the President of the EU-Turkey Joint Commission, Helene Flautre, it is time that the decisions taken by the EU reflect the reliability and the seriousness of the existing negotiation process.

This approach would be a win-win situation. Confidence between the two sides must be re-established, and the hopes raised in the population must be put into practice. The coming years must make integration a reality.