



## EU-Turkey relations – what about membership?

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The accession negotiations with Turkey began six years ago in 2005. Croatia, who started negotiations together with Turkey, just completed accession talks in June 2011. In the case of Turkey, only 13 of the 35 negotiation chapters have been opened and only one closed, while 17 chapters remain blocked by the EU due to Turkey's refusal to open its sea- and air- ports to Greek Cypriot vessels. Is there any chance that the process will move ahead and Turkey will become a member of the EU?

More likely, negotiations will soon come to a deadlock. From the remaining 5 chapters, only 3 chapters remain to be opened (public procurement, competition policy, social policy and employment), while for the last two (institutions and other issues) there is nothing to adopt. Most of the chapters that have been blocked however - for example all chapters connected to customs union issues - could be easily opened if the block is removed.

But the short-term outlook is not bright. Just recently the Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay stated that Turkey will freeze its relations with the European Union if Cyprus is given the EU presidency in 2012. The announcement come at a time of heightened tension between the two countries. Turkey objects to the Greek

Cypriot's unilateral drilling moves on a potential offshore gas deposit, saying such projects could negatively affect reunification talks and should be delayed until a new Cypriot state is formed.

The question of Turkish membership in the EU is one of the hot topics in any debate over the future of the EU. Should and will Turkey, a muslim country with 97% of its territory in Asia, ever join the „European club”? Can Europe even take in such a newcomer?

The negative attitude towards Turkey's accession in several EU countries, especially in France, Germany and Austria makes the eventual outcome of the process dubious. Even if the negotiations can be closed, some member states will hold a referendum on Turkey's accession, which would lead to an obviously (negative) result if the referendum were held today. The proposed new budget for 2014-2020 makes no mention of Turkey, implying that the EU-aspirant country will not be accepted until “at least” 2020 – if ever.

In his September visit to Germany, however, Turkish President Abdullah Gül reasserted Ankara's strategic goal of full membership. He said Turkey would respect an eventual decision by EU countries to deny Turkey full membership, but only after the completion of accession talks.

He urged EU politicians not to hamper the ongoing negotiation process. Gül also said it was hard to understand the concept of “privileged partnership” the German government is proposing for Turkey instead of full membership. Turkey, he pointed out, already has a privileged relationship with the European Union through the customs union agreement.

Turkey signed the customs union agreement in 1995 in the hope that it would be the direct antichambre toward full membership. The Customs Union involves the 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. In practice, for Turkey the customs union means the adoption of EU trade policy measures without having a say in trade-related decisions. And it may deeply harm Turkish interests if the EU concludes a free trade agreement with a third country, as it has recently done with South Korea. Turkey will no longer be able to impose tariffs on South Korean goods.

The customs union however has also had positive effects on Turkey. Since 2002, due to its dynamic economy and its robust economic growth Turkey has become one of the „new tigers” of the world economy. Even the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 caused little harm to the Turkish economy. Although its traditional markets in Europe have been stagnating in recent years, Turkish products and companies are welcomed in almost every country of the region. Turkish manufacturing exports are flowing to the Middle East. Construction companies are present in the Gulf region, Russia and Central Asia. Turks invest in the infrastructure of Western Bal-

kan countries and Azerbaijan. And the high growth rate is also fuelled by increasing domestic demand. Turkey's fast recovery after the crisis seems to support the sustainability of the current growth path.

In the longer term, a deepening economic crisis in Europe and the success of a growing group of developing countries lead by the BRIC countries (Brasil, Russia, India and China) and followed by others like Turkey undermines the position of Europe and confidence in the European success story. It raises the question: will Turkey still have the intention to become a member of the EU in the year 2020 or later?

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