



## **Sinan Ulgen**

Sinan Ulgen (1966) is a well-known analyst on Turkey and its relations with the European Union. His research and opinion articles have been widely published by international media as well as by think-thanks. As a diplomat in Brussels in the early 2000s, Ulgen witnessed Ankara's first steps on the road to EU membership.

The son of a diplomat, Ulgen spent his early years in Portugal, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia, Senegal and Mexico. In 1987 he graduated from the University of Virginia with a double major in computer science and economics. He then obtained a master's degree in European economic integration from the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. In his twenties he joined the Turkish foreign service. He first worked at the United Nations desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara. In 1992, he was posted as first secretary to the Turkish Permanent Delegation to the European Union in Brussels. The negotiations on the Customs Union, in which he participated, had just gotten under way.

Ulgen was also in Brussels during, as he calls it, "the golden era of Turkey and EU relations," the period between 1999, when Turkey was granted candidate status, until 2005, when accession negotiations began. In August 2002, the positive atmosphere paved the way for the Turkey's adoption of the most ambitious package of democratic reforms that the country had ever seen, says Ulgen. "This optimism was really the driving force behind the political reforms," he tells ESI.

In 1997, Ülgen left the diplomatic service and started his own consultancy practice. He is the author of two books entitled [The European transformation of modern Turkey](#) (2004), co-authored with former minister of economic affairs Kemal Dervis, and in Turkish "[AB ile Müzakerelerin El Kitabı](#)", a handbook on EU negotiations (2005). Ülgen's research and opinion articles have been widely published in the Turkish and international press, as well as by think-tanks such as the [Centre for European Policy Studies](#) and the [Atlantic Council of the US](#).

A founding partner of Istanbul Economics, a Turkish consultancy that provides advice to international companies wishing to invest in Turkey, Ülgen is currently the chairman of the [Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies \(EDAM\)](#), a well-known think-tank in Istanbul. The former diplomat is also a visiting scholar at [Carnegie Europe](#), where his research focuses on the implications of Turkish foreign policy – particularly its regional stance and its role in nuclear, energy, and climate issues – for Europe and the United States. In a November 2011 piece for Project Syndicate, [Turkey's 'zero problems' problem](#), Ülgen looked at Turkey's changing approach to its neighbours.

In his interview with ESI, Ülgen talks about the relationship between Ankara and Brussels over the past 20 years, weighing in on the establishment of the Customs Union, the “golden era” in relations, the Cyprus issue, and the changing attitudes of France and Germany. He talks about the current standstill in the accession negotiations and Turkey's growing economic importance. Ülgen also looks to the future. He argues, as he did in the paper [Turkey and the EU: An Alternative Approach](#), co-authored with Heather Grabbe, director of the Open Society Institute in Brussels, that Turkey and the EU have to find a new framework for future relations. The realistic solution, he suggests, is neither EU membership nor privileged partnership, but a role for Turkey as an “almost virtual member state.”