

## EU, TURKEY AND NEIGHBORHOOD POLICIES

*Turkey has been pursuing a new foreign policy which aims to transform Turkey into a regional soft power. Though the increased economic links and momentum in overcoming deadlocks between Turkey and its neighbors has received praise, criticism and questions have also been raised. Cooperation between the EU (the ENP) and Turkey in the overlapping neighborhood would allow Turkey to circumvent the criticism and allow the EU to have a more effective neighborhood policy. The EU has advantages such as conditionality that Turkey does not, while Turkey has, among other things, cultural proximity that aides the establishment of trust. The EU and Turkey can create synergy with their complementary strengths. This however is prevented by both suspended chapters and negative rhetoric coming from the political leadership of some EU countries, and the fact that Turkey is not prioritizing EU accession as in 2000-2005.*

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## *Negotiations with Turkey: A Close-ended Process?*

October 3, 2005 was a big moment for the European Union (EU)-Turkey relations – the start of EU accession negotiations. This had been decided at the summit of EU Heads of State or Government on 17 December 2004, as a result of the assessment that Turkey had sufficiently implemented the political criteria. Expectations and excitement were high in Turkey. The AKP government which had spent enormous political capital for the EU accession process after coming to power in November 2002 enjoyed the support of civil society, media, business community and the wider public for the reform process. According to the findings of *Transatlantic Trends Survey* conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, support for EU membership in Turkey was a record high of 73 percent in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

However, the official launch of the negotiations would not be very easy. Despite the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, some of the member states resisted opening negotiations. After lengthy discussions, members of the European Union and Turkey agreed on an accession framework document which stated that negotiations would be open-ended. The second paragraph of the Negotiating Framework with Turkey was as follows:

As agreed at the European Council in December 2004, these negotiations are based on Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union. The shared objective of the negotiations is accession. These negotiations are an open-ended process, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed beforehand. While having full regard to all Copenhagen criteria, including the absorption capacity of the Union, if Turkey is not in a position to assume in full all the obligations of membership it must be ensured that Turkey is fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond.<sup>2</sup>

The unprecedented reference to an “open ended process” was perceived as a double standard and an implication of an alternative to membership, i.e. “privileged partnership,” in Turkey.

Another hindrance in Turkey’s accession negotiations with the EU was the “Cyprus problem”. Turkey was required to extend the 1963 association agreement

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<sup>1</sup> [www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org)

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, Brussels, 12 October 2005.

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with the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community, to the Union's ten new member states – including the Greek Cypriot state, which is not recognized by Turkey. In July 2005, Turkey signed a protocol extending its customs union to the EU-10 states, but at the same time Ankara issued a declaration saying that its signature did not mean it had recognized the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey also refused to open its ports and airports to Cyprus and as a result, over Turkey's failure to implement the Ankara Protocol, the EU has suspended the opening of eight chapters.

Although the negotiating framework claimed that accession negotiations with Turkey would be “open-ended”, some European leaders wanted the process to be “close-ended” with one possible outcome: no membership. During his campaign for Presidency of France, Nicholas Sarkozy said: “I want to say that Europe must give itself borders, that not all countries have a vocation to become members of Europe, beginning with Turkey which has no place inside the European Union.”<sup>3</sup>

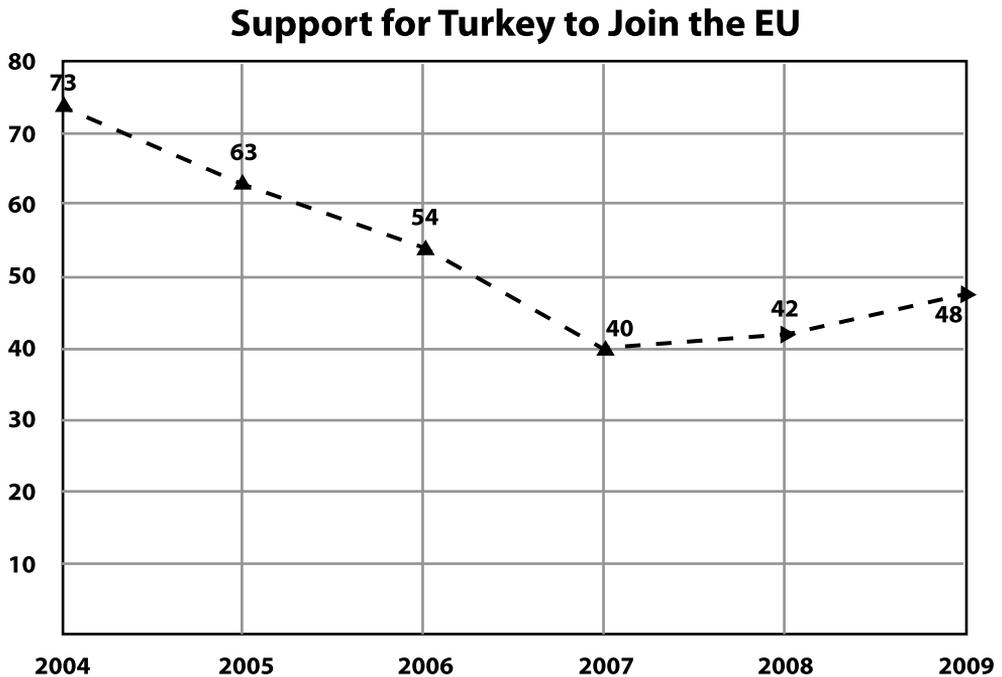
Sarkozy kept his campaign promise and blocked the opening of five chapters. According to Sarkozy, as well as the German Chancellor Merkel, Turkey could become not a full member, but a “privileged partner” of the EU.

These negative developments reflected on the mood of the Turkish public opinion quite strongly. As demonstrated in Chart I below, public support in Turkey for EU membership would go down from 73 percent in 2004 to 40 percent in 2007.

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<sup>3</sup> Eubusiness, 14 January 2007, [http://www.eubusiness.com/news\\_live/1168786802.44](http://www.eubusiness.com/news_live/1168786802.44).

Chart I: Support for EU Membership in Turkey



Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey: [www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org)

The problems in the negotiations and decreasing public support for EU membership have led to a slowdown of the reform process in Turkey. The AKP government which had spent enormous political capital for the reform process between 2002-2005 did not seem so enthusiastic anymore. Some analysts argue that the AKP was never enthusiastic about EU membership, but instrumentalized the accession process to increase its legitimacy at a time when it needed such support. One could also argue that it is easier to make reforms when there is a reward to come in two years as opposed to when there is no clear perspective.

Nevertheless, Turkey's EU accession process, which was a reason for great excitement in Turkey before 2005, has lost its priority on Turkey's agenda.

## *Turkish Aspirations to Become a Regional Soft Power*

While Turkey's accession process with the EU was coming to a standstill, there were other interesting developments in Turkey's foreign policy. The end of the Cold War and the U.S. response to the September 11 attacks have changed the geopolitical environment, bringing Turkey face to face with new threats, but also bringing new opportunities. Turkey's response under successive AKP governments has been to pursue a new foreign policy which aims to transform Turkey into an independent regional soft power. This new foreign policy approach has led Turkey to develop a neighborhood policy which requires zero problems and maximum cooperation with neighbors.

Turkey's historical and cultural ties with countries and peoples in the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia and Middle East provide Turkey with the opportunity and responsibility to play the role of a mediator in regional conflicts and contribute to peace and stability – between Israel and Syria, Iraq and Syria, in Lebanon and Iraq and in Bosnia Herzegovina, to give a few examples.

On the other hand, Turkey still has a range of unresolved problems with some of its neighbors, like Greece, Armenia and the Kurdish Regional Administration of Iraq. Over the last decade, Turkey has made significant efforts to resolve these conflicts. The efforts of Georgios Papandreou, who is now the Prime Minister of Greece and the late Ismail Cem improved relations between Turkey and Greece, albeit, did not solve the deadlocks. Although most of the disagreements are still on the table, Greece and Turkey are no longer the adversaries they used to be. It was unfortunate that the Annan Plan was rejected in the referendum that was made on the Greek part of Cyprus, but Turkey still continues to support the peace talks on the island. The tense relations between Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Administration in Iraq have been replaced with close cooperation. Last, but not the least, Turkey and Armenia have signed protocols that will, when ratified by the respective parliaments, lead to the opening of the sealed border between the two countries and the establishment of diplomatic relations. The ratification is practically contingent on the developments regarding another conflict, between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and other territories of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia.

Another aspect of Turkey's neighborhood policy is trade and economic cooperation. In his essay named "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The

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Rise of the Trading State”, Kemal Kirişçi argues that “Turkey is being transformed from a post-Cold Warrior to a trading state”. Kirişçi further argues that “The zero-problem policy with the neighbors of the AKP government could be considered a blue-print manifestation of the foreign policy of a trading state.”<sup>4</sup>

Foreign trade statistics support Prof Kirişçi’s view. Although the EU is still Turkey’s most important trading partner by far, its neighborhood is emerging as another important trading partner for Turkey.

As demonstrated in Table I below, Turkey’s exports to immediate neighbors increased by 312 percent between the years 2003-2008 while Turkey’s exports to the EU increased by 131 percent during the same period. In 2008, 48 percent of Turkish exports were made to members of the EU while 23 percent were made to neighbors of Turkey. If other countries that Turkey does not share a border with (but are in the region) are included in the calculation, the weight of trade with “neighbors” in Turkey’s, overall foreign trade is even greater.

**Table I: Exports From Turkey to Selected Group of Countries**

	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>% Increase</b>	<b>% Total in 2008</b>
<b>Total</b>	47.252.836	132.027.258	179%	100 %
<b>EU 27<sup>5</sup></b>	27.393.762	63.390.481	131%	48 %
<b>Neighbours<sup>6</sup></b>	7.413.931	30.526.579	284%	23%

Source: Turkish Statistical Istitute, *Foreign Trade by Countries Repor*, [www.tuik.gov.tr](http://www.tuik.gov.tr)

For Turkey, another important element of economic cooperation with neighbors is capital flow and investments. The hike in oil prices has increased the amount of capital accumulation particularly in the Gulf countries leading to an increase

<sup>4</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, 2009, : pp 29-57.

<sup>5</sup> EU 27 stands for members of the European Union.

<sup>6</sup> The countries included are Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Israel.

in the flow of capital from these countries to Turkey. On the other hand, Turkish companies are also making increasing amounts of investments in the Balkans, Russian Federation, Caucasus and the Middle East.

In addition to the efforts of the government and the private sector, Turkish NGOs are actively supporting Turkey's soft power in its neighborhood. A good example is the "Industry for Peace Initiative" launched by the Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB).<sup>7</sup> During November 2007, President of Turkey Abdullah Gül, President of Israel Simon Perez and President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmood Abbas met within the framework of the Ankara Forum that was launched by TOBB, as part of the Industry for Peace Initiative, with the participation of the Manufacturers Association of Israel and the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce. At this meeting the three presidents decided to support the project to revitalize the Erez Industrial Free Zone which is located at the Northern tip of Gaza. The Erez Project was interrupted by the Gaza War in 2009.

The combined efforts of the government, private sector and civil society have made Turkey an important actor in its neighborhood. However, there is also some skepticism over these developments.

Some of Turkey's neighbors with which Turkey is trying to build strong ties are those that Turkey's Western allies have serious problems with. One important example is Turkey's divergence from the transatlantic approach towards Iran's nuclear ambitions. The United States defends the idea that Iran's efforts to build nuclear military capability should be stopped by diplomatic pressure, and the option of military action should be kept on the table. European countries think that a military option should not be a choice, but that Iran should be deterred by diplomatic pressure. Turkey on the other hand, consistent with its neighborhood policy, wants no problems with Iran and aims to talk Iran out of its nuclear ambition, keeping both the military option and sanctions off the table.

Another criticism towards Turkey is the rhetoric and language used by Turkish leaders in foreign policy. The rhetoric and language Turkish leaders chose to use in criticizing Israel over the Gaza War provides a good example to this.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.industryforpeace.org](http://www.industryforpeace.org) (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Israel).

Engagement as opposed to isolation is one of the main instruments of Turkey's neighborhood policy. However, some of the actors Turkey engages with, like the dictator of Sudan or the military branch of Hamas, do raise eyebrows among some of Turkey's allies.

Turkey could easily avert these criticisms if it found a way to coordinate its efforts in its neighborhood with the efforts of its western allies. It is worth taking a look at the European Neighborhood Policy in this regard.

### ***European Neighborhood Policy***

“The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2004, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all concerned.”<sup>8</sup> The ENP is the main source of soft power for the European Union.

The most important instruments used by the ENP are ENP Action Plans signed between the EU and partner countries. These documents are negotiated with and tailor-made for each country, based on the country's needs and capacities, as well as the interests of the respective country and the EU. They jointly define an agenda of political and economic reforms by means of short and medium-term priorities. So far, ENP Action Plans were signed with Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

The implementation of the mutual commitments covered in the Action Plans is then monitored by subcommittees. Implementation is supported by financial and technical assistance extended by the EU.

One of the goals of the ENP is to create regional integration. “The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership” relaunched in 2008 as “Union for the Mediterranean” with the initiative of the French President and the Eastern Partnership Initiative presented by the Foreign Minister of Poland with the support of Sweden are two initiatives aiming to support the southern and eastern dimensions of this regional integration goal.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/policy_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/partners/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/partners/index_en.htm)

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The European Neighborhood Policy has made a difficult start. The war in Georgia, Russia's approach to its neighbors, the Gaza War and the economic crisis have prevented any serious progress within the ENP. While southern partners are experiencing more of the same integration fatigue (due to reforms they need to make for better access to the internal market of the EU) eastern partners resent the fact that they are not in an accession process.

One of the weaknesses of the ENP so far has been the inability to bring in third parties with substantial contribution. One of these third parties is Turkey. Turkey, as an accession candidate is neither a member of the EU nor a partner within the framework of ENP. Moreover, Turkey now has its own neighborhood policy which covers most of the countries that are partners of ENP. It is worth examining the possibility of cooperation between ENP and Turkey's efforts in its neighborhood.

### ***Turkey and the ENP***

ENP and Turkey's neighborhood policy coincide in goals and scope but diverge in means and methodology. Both policies aim to contribute to peace, stability and cooperation in the respective neighborhoods which in this case overlap to a large extent.

Needless to say, the EU enjoys serious advantages when compared to Turkey in terms of neighborhood policy. It has a financial capacity and ability to transform partners through conditionality that Turkey lacks. On the other hand, Turkey has proved to have other advantages that the EU lacks, such as geographic or cultural proximity which make it possible for Turkey to establish trust based relationships in its neighborhood.

This complementary nature makes it possible for the EU and Turkey to create a real synergy in their neighborhood. Turkey, with the EU behind it would be much more effective in its neighborhood. As a matter of fact, one of the factors that makes Turkey attractive for countries in the region is Turkey's relations with the EU. If Turkey were acting in coordination with the EU in its neighborhood no country would ask the question "Is Turkey changing its axis?" On the other hand, the EU could communicate much more effectively with the partners of ENP if it had Turkey at its side.

However, this synergy will come not naturally, but through deliberate action. First of all the problematic nature of Turkey's accession negotiations need to be changed. The suspended chapters and negative rhetoric coming from political leadership of some member countries do not help the process. Turkey on the other hand needs to make EU accession a priority as it was between 2000-2005 and accelerate the reform process.

Another important step would be to create consultation mechanisms through which the EU and Turkey could coordinate and even integrate their efforts in the neighborhood. Turkey in this case would need to upgrade its efforts from bilateral to regional and contribute more substantially to EU initiatives like "Union for the Mediterranean" and "Eastern Partnership".

Closer cooperation between EU and Turkey would on the one hand bring Turkey closer to the EU and strengthen Turkey's prospects for eventual membership. On the other hand, if Turkey integrated its efforts in the neighborhood with ENP, no country would have any doubts that Turkey is trying to develop an alternative to EU accession. Last, but not the least, there are countries and peoples in the Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and the Middle East which would benefit from such a cooperation. This would be a win for all.