

A very special relationship

Why Turkey's EU Accession Process Will Continue



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Executive summary: Doomsday postponed



Turkey and the EU: a catholic marriage

The widespread sense among observers that the Turkish EU accession process might be headed for imminent failure has been present from its very outset. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, however, the risk of a “train crash” in the accession talks is minimal. The reason for this is reassuringly self-evident: it is neither in Turkey’s interest, nor the EU’s, to derail the accession train.

We predict that even ten years from now, unless Turkey will have joined the EU as a full member, the accession process will be ongoing. Today’s relationship between Turkey and the EU is like a Catholic marriage: divorce is not an option for either side. The only question then is whether the couple will be happy or not and the only special partnership that is acceptable to Turkey and to the vast majority of EU members is one they have today – an open-ended accession process.

There are only two ways for the current accession talks to end or be suspended: one is for Turkey to give up and walk away from the negotiating table; the other is for the EU member states to decide on a suspension. The first of these scenarios would require a major policy shift inside Turkey, which is very unlikely. Imagining a scenario whereby the opponents of Turkish accession inside the EU succeed in suspending the negotiations is just as difficult – not only because it is not in their interests, but also because it is not in their power. The combined votes of Germany, France, Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Austria (to name some of the countries where scepticism about Turkey’s EU membership has been an important part of the domestic debate) would fall far short of the 255 needed to suspend the negotiating process. Barring a return to the pattern of human rights abuses of the 1990s, a reintroduction of the death penalty or a military takeover in Turkey, the EU cannot unilaterally stop a process to which it has committed itself under the Negotiating Framework. Here, all the cards are in the hands of Turkey’s politicians.



Young Turks travelling through Europe. Photo: Sena Maric/ESI

There is a perception among many in Turkey that the EU has consistently discriminated against their country. Yet since 1999 Turkey has often been given the benefit of the doubt. In 1999 it was given candidate status despite failing to meet the EU's human rights criteria. In 2004, despite only "sufficiently" meeting the Copenhagen political criteria, it was allowed to open accession talks – the only candidate country to be allowed such leeway. It was a policy of positive encouragement, and it worked well and in the European interest.

At the same time, any objective assessment would conclude that Turkey remains some way from meeting the conditions for accession. Turkey's human rights record – though vastly improved over the past decade – remains dismal by European standards. Restrictions on free speech, the number of minors in prison (2,460 as of July 2010) and the situation of women (Turkey ranked 101st out of 110 countries in the UN's 2009 Gender Empowerment Measure and 126th out of 134 in the 2010 Global Gender Gap Index) are all matters of serious concern. The EU is also worried about the security and economic situation in South East Anatolia, by far the poorest region in Europe.

One area where the EU has discriminated against Turkey has been in the field of visa-free travel. This suggests an obvious way to show that EU conditionality vis-à-vis Turkey remains "strict but fair": to offer Ankara a visa roadmap similar to that which has been given to Western Balkan countries. Once the roadmap requirements are met, Turkish citizens should be able to travel to the EU without a visa. Visa-free travel to the EU is a right enjoyed by Central Europeans (since the early 1990s) and by most people living in the Western Balkans (since 2009). The EU already promised it to Turkey under the 1963 Association Agreement. A credible visa liberalisation process would provide tangible evidence to ordinary citizens that the EU remains committed to a future integration perspective. It would also be a useful tool to advance the implementation of non-discrimination policies and promote further improvements in Turkey's human rights record, bringing down still high rates of asylum requests granted to Turkish citizens in EU member states. Such a reform process would be a win-win proposition for the EU and Turkey and a big shot in the arm for the accession process.

Conventional wisdoms about Turkish accession to the EU



Derailed train. Photo: flickr/Dante Laurini Jr

In October 2005 the European Union opened accession negotiations with Turkey, [the world's 15th largest economy](#). Since then, Turkey has endeavoured to adapt a huge part of its legislation to the approximately 130,000 pages of rules and regulations that apply to all EU member states, as stated on the [webpage on the EU delegation to Turkey](#). The pace of the accession talks, if measured by the number of negotiation chapters opened and closed, has been slow. By November 2010, Turkey had opened 13 chapters and closed just one. Croatia, which started negotiations at the same time, had opened 33 chapters and closed 25 during the same period. No wonder that the past few years have witnessed increasing fears that Turkey's accession process might be grounding to a halt.

For the most part, the naysayers have referred to one or more of the following four "conventional wisdoms":

1. The process will "die with a bang" (a fundamental disagreement over policy will result in a "train wreck").
2. The process will "die with a whimper" (both sides will run out of chapters to negotiate).
3. The process is destined for failure because of European Islamophobia, double standards and popular opposition to Turkey's accession in key member states.
4. The process is destined for failure because of the Turkish elite's unwillingness to make concessions on key policy issues and to seriously embrace EU standards.

The conclusion for those who believe in one or more of these scenarios is that the accession process is already a dead letter; and that while it may continue, neither side takes it seriously enough anymore to invest in making it a success.

In fact, such speculation is misplaced. The Turkish accession process is far more resilient, be it to outside shocks, political rhetoric or “enlargement fatigue”, than meets the eye. Today’s relationship between Turkey and the EU is like a Catholic marriage. Divorce is simply not an option. The real question, which obviously matters enormously to both sides, is whether the couple can be a happy one. And the only “special relationship” that is acceptable to Turkey and to the vast majority of EU members is one they have today – an open-ended accession process.

The first scenario: a train wreck



Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy agree that Turkey should not become an EU member, but “a privileged partner”. Photo: European Council

The widespread sense among observers – in Turkey and abroad – that the accession process might be headed for disaster has been present nearly from its outset. In June 2006, none other than EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warned against a possible [“train crash” with Turkey over Cyprus](#). “Turkish crash looms for Europe,” warned a [BBC article in September 2006](#). “Train crash or temporary derailment?” asked a [paper for the European Policy Centre](#). Around the same time, the [Ankara Chamber of Commerce reported](#) that “Turkey fell under the train.”

The doomsday scenario resurfaced at the end of 2008, with the [SETimes reporting](#) that “Turkey faces a possible ‘train crash’ with the EU next year”. In October 2009 [Mehmet Ozcan of the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organisation \(USAk\)](#) warned of a possible “train crash of the accession process in December.” The railway-related metaphors have caught on among commentators. A Google search for “Turkey”, “train crash” and “accession” yields 7,500 results.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Photo: German Government

Contrary to these speculations, the risk of a “train crash” is minimal. In recent years a number of developments provoked talk of looming disaster: Ankara’s failure to ratify the Ankara Protocol, which it signed in 2005, and which would extend the Turkey-EU customs union to Cyprus; the presidential elections in France, which brought to power Nicolas Sarkozy, in 2007; the German parliamentary elections in 2005 (which made Angela Merkel Chancellor of Germany) and in 2009 (which saw the pro-Turkish accession SPD go into opposition). Yet none of them produced the disaster itself.

The reason for this is reassuringly self-evident. The train crash never took place simply because it is neither in Turkey’s interest, nor the EU’s, to stop the accession process any time soon. The overwhelming majority of EU member states still see Turkish accession as a potential boon to Europe. The Turkish government still sees the accession process as a boon to Turkey.



Train tracks. Photo: Samurai

There are only two ways for the talks to end or be suspended: one is for Turkey to give up and walk away from the negotiating table; the other is for the EU member states to decide on a suspension. The first of these scenarios would require a major policy shift inside Turkey. Even if Turks might be losing faith in the accession process, such a shift is very unlikely. In the near future, it is difficult to expect the AKP – or even the current opposition – to turn its back on the country’s longstanding foreign policy priority and to alienate the many Turks who still favour a continued accession process.

Why both Turkey and the EU want to avoid a train crash

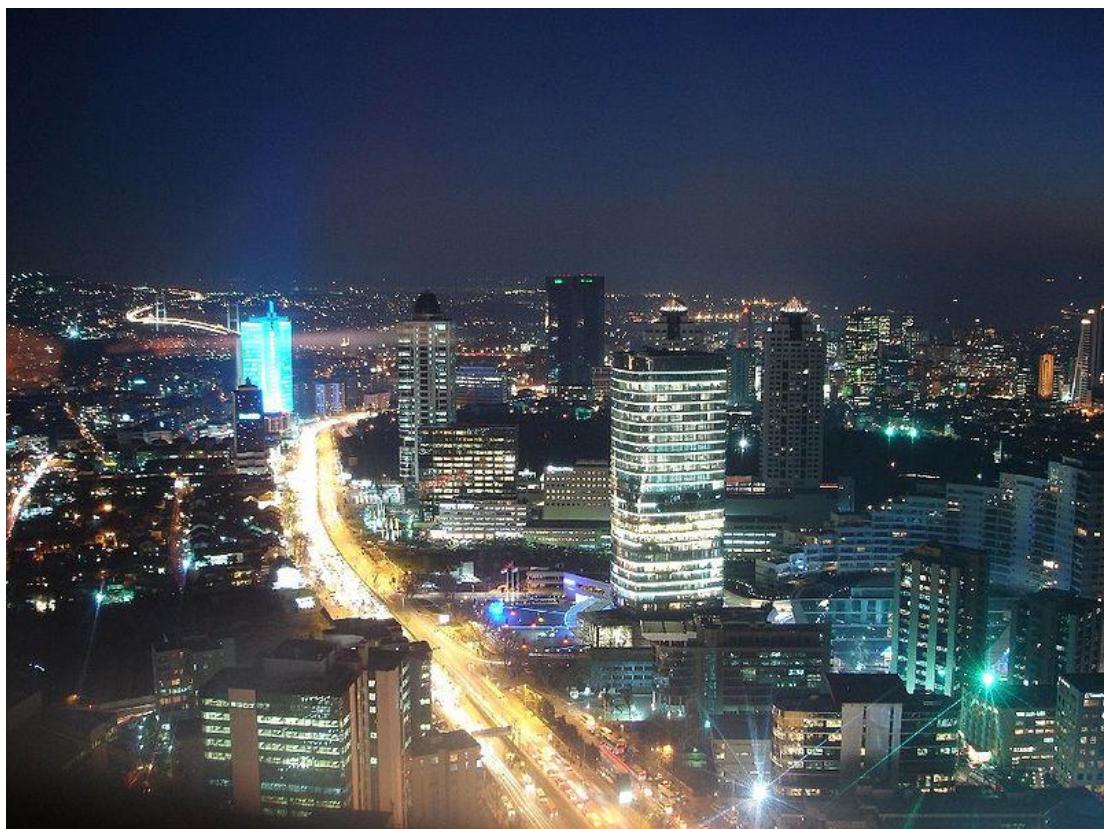


A child and two women holding Turkey and EU balloons. Photo: World Bank

There are a number of good reasons why no Turkish government would see it as in its interest to walk away from the negotiating table. One reason is obvious: an end to the process would be read, in Turkey and in the world, as a failure. If there is no reason to admit defeat, why do so? Turkey did not leave the Council of Europe in the 1990s, when it was under heavy criticism for massive human rights violations. It did not end its status as an associate of the European Union at a time of massive criticism and tensions with Greece. Why should it now walk away from a process that has enhanced its stature in its own neighbourhood and in the world?

The second reason is economic. The accession process, beginning with Turkey's candidacy in 1999, has coincided with a period of unprecedented economic growth. Between 2002 and 2008, the country's GDP grew at an average rate of roughly 6 percent per year. Between 2002 and 2006, per capita GDP doubled, from USD 3,400 to USD 7,365 (EUR 2,417 to EUR 5,236). In 2009, it is estimated at USD 8,248 (EUR 5,863) (all [World Bank data](#)). Although Turkey has been trading with the EU for decades, and has been a member of the Customs Union since December 1995, it is only in recent years that it has begun to attract substantial foreign direct investment (FDI). FDI – more than two thirds of it originating from the EU – skyrocketed from less than USD 1 billion in 2000 to USD 20 billion in 2007 ([Foreign Policy Centre in 2008](#)). FDI was USD 8 billion even during the global economic crisis in 2009.

While it is always hard to quantify the correlation between the EU accession process and sustained economic growth – the recent boom would not have happened without a series of economic reforms launched in 2001 and sustained since – the link between the two is undeniable. It is no coincidence that all other candidate countries, from Poland to Bulgaria, experienced a surge in GDP and FDI after being placed on the track to membership.



Levent financial district in Istanbul. Photo: Wikipedia Commons/Geia sou Levendi

The EU process has measurably reduced uncertainty among investors. As [economist Mehmet Ugur explained in a paper for the Foreign Policy Centre](#), “IMF and EU conditionality, the explicit manner in which the AKP government has committed to ‘own’ their prescriptions, and the prospect for starting EU accession negotiations by 2005 have all combined to create a unique environment for economic recovery and performance since 2002.” There is also the concrete issue of Turkey’s access to capital and the costs of borrowing. [Ugur notes](#) that “All major international organisations (the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD, etc.), as well as major international banks and rating agencies welcomed the EU accession process as an anchor for stability and sustained economic growth in Turkey.” As fellow economist Refik Erzan observed in 2007, the government’s adherence to the accession track has been perceived as a guarantee by the home and international business communities. Furthermore, thanks largely to the impact of the EU process,

“Turkey has outperformed the Emerging Market Bond Index since 2003 despite its major current account deficit. It has enjoyed a considerably lower spread than that for Brazil until very recently. This is generally interpreted as the EU bonus.”¹

¹ Erzan, R. “Windfall Gains of the EU Membership Process”, Turkey-EU Civil Society Dialogue: Turkey EU Observatory Conferences; Observatory Outputs, Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University, pp. 31-36, December 2007.



Refik Erzan

An unprecedented period of economic growth, a twenty billion dollar surge in FDI, significantly improved access to capital markets... Political factors aside, for Turkey to put all this at stake by walking away from the negotiations would be foolish – and thus very unlikely.

Some argue that recent growth – in 2010 Turkey's GDP is estimated to grow by [8 percent, the fastest in Europe](#) – shows that Turkey “no longer needs the EU.” This is grandstanding. Turkey is still one of the [poorest countries in Europe](#) (and the poorest member of the OECD in per capita terms). Most importantly, it has had periods of high growth before (in the 1950s, in the 1960s, and in the mid 1980s), only to see its efforts to catch up with Europe brought to a halt by instability. The pattern of boom-bust development since World War II is too recent for a suspension in accession talks not to unnerve serious investors. Last month a [country survey in The Economist](#) celebrated Turkey's transformation. Yet an October 2002 *Economist* survey of Greece, entitled “[Prometheus Unbound](#)”, was similarly optimistic. In hard times a credible anchor is welcome – and the anchor of an EU accession process comes at little cost.

Imagining a scenario whereby the opponents of Turkish accession inside the EU succeed in suspending the negotiations is just as difficult – not only because it is not in their interest, but also because it is not in their power. Let us assume a “worst case” scenario: the Cyprus talks break down completely; Geert Wilders’ Party for Freedom begins to dominate the debate on enlargement in the Netherlands; Turkey-sceptical governments in France, Germany and Austria continue to govern; and Greece (re)joins the anti-Turkey camp in a show of solidarity with Cyprus. Could the opponents of Turkish membership join forces to stop the accession talks?



Geert Wilders. Photo: geertwilders.nl

According to the EU's Lisbon Treaty ([Protocol 36, Art. 3](#)), the decision to suspend negotiations requires the backing of a qualified majority of the Union's member states. Given the current distribution of voting power in the EU Council, the combined votes of Germany, France, Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Austria – 97 in total – would fall far short of the 255 needed to bring the negotiating process to a close. Even if many other countries were to join the group, it would still not form a qualified majority.

In line with the Treaty's transitional provisions, the system described above is set to expire in October 2014. As of that date, the sceptics will require a majority of at least 55 percent of member states representing at least 65 percent of the Union's population to suspend Turkey's accession process, rendering such a possibility as unlikely as before ([Lisbon Treaty, Art. 16](#)). As Marc Pierini, head of the EU Delegation to Turkey, observed during a 2010 conference of the Heinrich Boll Stiftung in Turkey, "The vast majority of EU member states do not want these negotiations to stop. It is as simple as that."

It would take more than a political setback on the Cyprus issue – or even the rise of another European leader opposed to Turkish accession – to change this. Even for the most hard-line politicians in Cyprus, bringing the Turkish accession process to an end would be counterproductive. After all, the process constitutes Nicosia's only tangible source of leverage over Ankara.

The negotiations might last for a very long time. Turkey will face many more obstacles. Once the talks are concluded, the accession treaty will not enter into force until and unless it is ratified by all member states ([Lisbon Treaty, Art. 49](#)). Whether this final hurdle will then be overcome remains an open question. Until then, however, no single member state – or even several states – can throw Turkey under the train.

The second scenario: a natural death



Nicosia. Photo: flickr/LaRezistance

If the talks are unlikely to be suspended, will they die a “natural death” instead? If Turkey’s EU accession process does not end with a bang, will it end with a whimper? The tortuously slow pace with which the EU negotiations have progressed, combined with the sense that new obstacles await, has produced fears that the accession process – cue the train metaphor – might soon run out of steam. Then Turkey and the EU “will have nothing left to talk about.”

The prospect appears real. The accession negotiations between the EU and candidate countries are subdivided into 35 chapters, each of which corresponds to an area of policy and a body of national law that must be changed to meet EU standards. Since the opening of negotiations in 2005, Turkey has opened 13 chapters. These are Science and Research, Enterprise and Industrial policy, Statistics, Financial Control, Trans-European Networks, Consumer and Health Protection, Company Law, Intellectual Property Rights, Freedom of Movement of Capital, Information Society and Media, Taxation, Environment and Food Safety. Of these, it has closed one: Science and Research. 22 negotiating chapters have yet to be opened.

At the heart of the problem over opening new chapters stands the issue of Cyprus. From 1987, when it was made, until 2004, when Cyprus joined the EU, Turkey’s decision to close its ports to Cypriot vessels remained a bilateral issue between Ankara and Nicosia. After the failed attempt at Cypriot reunification in April 2004, a divided Cyprus – a Greek Cypriot south and a Turkish Cypriot north – entered the EU. As a result, the December 2004 EU summit attached a proviso to its decision to open accession negotiations with Turkey: for the talks to get under way, Ankara would first have to extend its customs union with Europe to all the new member states, including Cyprus. Though this did not imply recognition of the Republic of Cyprus, as the Turks repeatedly made clear, it did imply that Turkey would have

to open its ports to traffic from Cyprus.

Turkey signed the respective additional protocol to the Ankara Agreement in July 2005. This paved the way for the official launch of accession negotiations in October 2005. However, it did not ratify the protocol. Its ports remained closed to the Republic of Cyprus. In response, on 11 December 2006 the EU Council froze the opening of eight chapters “covering policy areas relevant to Turkey’s restrictions as regards the Republic of Cyprus”. These were: 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. The Council also decided that no chapter will be provisionally closed until Turkey fully applies the Protocol.

Half a year later, the French government blocked an additional four chapters on the grounds that their opening would hinder French plans for an alternative relationship – i.e. something short of membership – between Turkey and the EU. (The chapters blocked by France were Economic and Monetary Policy; Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments; Financial and Budgetary Provisions; and Institutions. Most of these chapters are usually dealt with at the very end of the accession talks. France also stated that it intended to block Agriculture and Rural Development, which had already been frozen by the 2006 Council decision.)



Nicolas Sarkozy. Photo: flickr/Downing Street

Finally, on 8 December 2009 Cyprus blocked six more chapters (Freedom of Movement of Workers; Energy; Judiciary and Fundamental Rights; Justice, Freedom and Security; Education and Culture; and Foreign, Security and Defence Policy). Cypriot Foreign Minister Markos Kyprianou declared that Cyprus had “decided to proceed to the introduction of specific terms and preconditions on the negotiation chapters, which are related to each one of Turkey’s obligations, as contained in ... the December 2006 European Council Conclusions. ... Non-fulfilment of the preconditions will not allow the opening of these chapters.”

The cumulative effect of these decisions leaves only four chapters to be opened: Public Procurement, Competition Policy, Social Policy and Employment, and Other Issues. (The last of these is usually opened at the very end of the negotiations.)

Anxiety as to what this means for the future of the accession process has since taken hold. In January 2010, [Katinka Barysch of the Centre for European Reform wrote](#) of a “looming deadlock in Turkey’s EU accession bid”, warning that negotiations “would risk dying a slow death as the EU and Turkey simply run out of things to negotiate.” As [Amanda Paul put it, writing for Today’s Zaman](#), “once the handful of remaining chapters that are not blocked are opened, there will be nothing left and Turkey and the EU will find themselves running into the sand.”

But are these fears justified? There can be no doubt that the inability to open chapters is contributing to intense frustration not only among Turkish politicians (and negotiators) but also among those who work on Turkish accession in the EU institutions. But what would actually happen if Turkey and the EU run out of chapters to open by the end of 2011?

While such a scenario would be problematic from a political perspective, it would not mean an end to the accession process. The reason is simple: the process is about much more than the negotiations chapters themselves. There would still be regular meetings at all levels between Turkish and European experts. There would still be regular meetings under the Turkey-EU Association Council. There would still be work on all the (very demanding) chapters already opened. There would still be regular assessments by EU officials for the annual progress report. There would still be significant (and increasing) EU pre-accession assistance.

At the same time there is no reason to assume that the process of adopting EU standards in Turkey would come to a halt. Even if the opening and closing of chapters is placed on hold, progress in the policy areas that these chapters represent can proceed independently. Turkish policy makers are well aware of this. As Chief EU Negotiator Egemen Bagis made clear during the presentation of Turkey’s new EU strategy at a conference organised by the Turkish Secretariat-General for EU Affairs (EUSG) in February 2010 in Istanbul:

“Turkey will pursue its work in the framework of all 35 chapters … disregarding if they are suspended or blocked by some EU member states. Once the EU decides to open politically blocked chapters, Turkey’s existing progress in the relevant field will facilitate the closing of the chapter in question.”

Such a strategy is made easier as a result of the EU’s screening process – a process whereby, at the very beginning of the accession talks, the European Commission highlights the steps that a candidate country needs to take in order to align its laws and policies with those of the EU. Under the screening process, the Commission has already drafted reports assessing Turkey’s readiness to open most of the negotiation chapters and indicated whether additional opening benchmarks are needed. (All of the screening meetings with Turkey were completed by October 2006. However, given that some member states have not yet agreed to their adoption in the Council, a total of ten screening reports have not yet been published or sent to Turkey.)



Ambassador Volkan Bozkir from the Turkish EUSG

As Ambassador Volkan Bozkir from the EUSG acknowledged during the February 2010 conference, this has made it possible for the Turkish side to work on suspended chapters as if they had been opened. “We do not have the luxury to suspend,” says Bozkir. “We have to work on them, and we can work on them because we know from the screening what is expected from us.”

Why Turkey is implementing the acquis



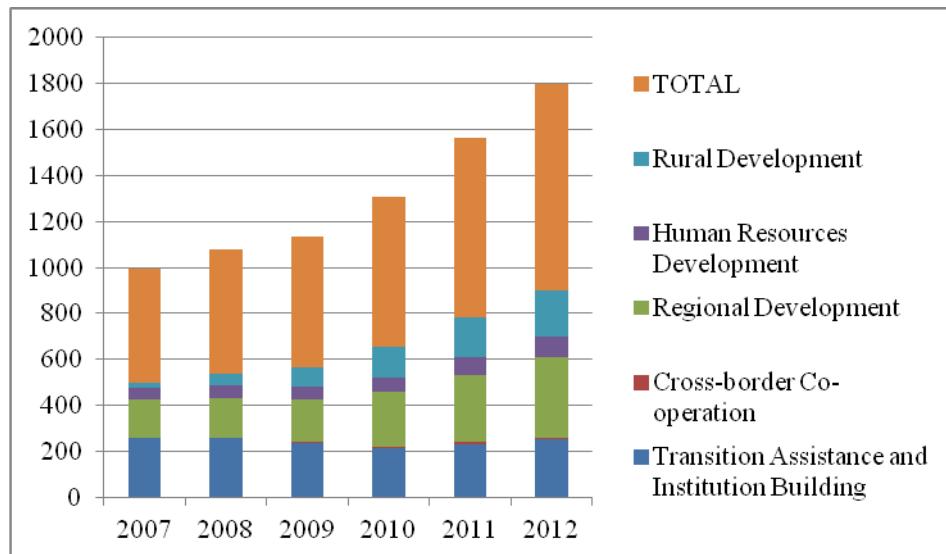
Tayip Recep Erdogan and José Manuel Barroso. Photo: European Commission

The continuous adoption of EU legislation and introduction of EU standards by Turkey has not gone unnoticed. Since 2005, the Commission's yearly Progress Reports have charted Turkey's track record in all policy areas covered by the negotiation process, independent of the pace of the negotiations themselves. The fact that Turkey has delivered reforms in chapters that have not yet been opened is clearly recognised in the Commission's most recent [2010 Progress Report](#). Of the 23 chapters where the report cites "some" or "good" progress, 11 are actually blocked.

Just as nothing impedes Turkey from making headway on chapters that have been blocked, nothing impedes the Commission from facilitating such progress. Despite the crisis over the opening of chapters, the EU has significantly increased the resources devoted to its relations with Turkey. The [EU Delegation in Ankara](#) is now the biggest of the EU's 130 delegations and offices around the world, with 137 staff. The EU has also raised its yearly [financial support for the Turkish reform process](#) in all areas – even where chapters are blocked – to EUR 900 million in 2012. Including past commitments, the EU is currently supporting the implementation of [more than 250 projects in Turkey, worth a total amount of about EUR 2 billion](#). EU pre-accession assistance is likely to increase further in the years to come, whether or not any new chapters are opened. The money has certainly not gone to waste. Although it has criticized the lack of a "mechanism to ensure that the projects represented the best use of EU financial resources in achieving the accession partnership priorities," [the European Court of Auditors has noted](#) that "the audited projects mostly achieved their planned outputs and the

results were likely to be sustained.”

*Graph: IPA funds for Turkey in 2007-2012 (in million Euros),
(website of the EU Delegation in Ankara)*



Funds drawn from the EU’s Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) are managed directly by Turkey in consultation with the European Commission. As EUSG’s Director for Political Affairs Alp Ay told ESI in December 2009, Turkish line ministries have proved effective in taking advantage of the available financing:

“Turkey received the first EU pre-accession funds in 2002. At the time there were rumours that Turkey’s absorption capacity was so limited that it would only be able to spend about three percent of the funds – actually 95 percent of these funds have been spent. And at the last call for proposals of IPA Component I, we had to make a hard choice among the 130 project proposals which were brought forward and of which we could only select about 30-40.”

Table: allocation of EU Pre-accession Funding for Turkey (million Euros)

Component	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Transition Assistance and Institution Building	256.7	256.1	233.2	211.3	230.6	250.9
Cross-border Co-operation	2.0	2.8	9.3	9.5	9.7	9.9
Regional Development	167.5	173.8	182.7	238.1	291.4	350.8
Human Resources Development	50.2	52.9	55.6	63.4	77.6	89.9
Rural Development	20.7	53.0	85.5	131.3	172.5	197.8
Total	497.2	538.7	566.4	653.7	781.9	899.5

Such financial assistance, combined with EU guidelines, benchmarks, and twinning projects, has helped Turkey make headway in a number of fields. In chapters like financial services, economic and monetary policy, customs union and free movement of goods (all of them blocked), Turkey has achieved significant alignment with the EU. According to one

Commission official, interviewed by ESI in November 2010, “if there were the political will to open these chapters, progress would be quick.”

When political circumstances allow for new chapters to be opened, Turkey can be prepared to hit the ground running. By adopting the EU acquis in most areas it will have made it much easier to open new chapters and much easier to close them. This is anything but idle speculation. When legal alignment is secured, the accession process can proceed very quickly. The Accession Conference – an intergovernmental meeting between a candidate country and the member states during which negotiations on a new chapter are formally launched – can be called at will. Crucially, [the conference can decide to open more than one chapter at a time](#). In Croatia’s case, six chapters were opened on one day in June 2007. Likewise, more than one chapter can be closed during the conference. On 2 October 2009, Croatia closed five. A few chapters can even be opened and closed on the very same day, as was the case with the chapter on Science and Research in the negotiations with Turkey and Croatia. Egemen Bagis assumes that “if the chapters are unblocked, Turkey can open and close 12 chapters in six to nine months.” (Speech at the “Turkey in Europe” meeting of the European Greens/EFA Group, Istanbul, 1 November 2010.)

An early breakthrough in the accession talks may not be likely but it is not inconceivable either. After all, Turkey can “unfreeze” eight negotiation chapters with the snap of a finger. The opening of these chapters hinges *not* on any comprehensive solution to the Cyprus issue – which might be years away – but on a political decision to ratify and implement the Ankara Protocol. This is politically very sensitive, but technically easy. It will be made much easier politically if and when the EU adopts the direct trade regulation (DTR) with northern Cyprus, which the European Commission has recently put before the European Parliament. The chances for a swift adoption of the DTR were dealt a setback on 20 October 2010, when the Parliament’s Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) opined that the proper legal basis for the DTR was the Accession Treaty with Cyprus (which does not provide for any involvement of the European Parliament and requires unanimity in the Council) and not Article 207 of the Lisbon Treaty (which requires “co-decision” by the EP and a qualified majority in the Council, and bypassing a possible Cypriot veto. (For more information, see Nathalie Tocci, [The Baffling Short-sightedness in the EU-Turkey-Cyprus Triangle](#), Istituto Affari Internazionali, October 2010.)

Despite the JURI committee’s vote, the EP has not yet had its final say on the matter. The dossier has now been forwarded to the presidents of the Parliament’s political groups, who will decide when to table it for a plenary vote. In other words, although it might not be any time soon (given a lack of agreement on the issue among and within the political groups), the DTR will still be voted on by the EP plenary.

Things might also change quickly inside the EU. Not too long ago, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, a vocal opponent of Turkish accession, seemed likely to win re-election in 2012. Today, however, with Sarkozy’s popularity ratings at an all time low, it is conceivable that the 2012 election may deprive the anti-Turkey camp of its most outspoken member.



BEKO is among the largest producers of consumer electronics and home appliances in Europe. Photo: BEKO

In the absence of an early breakthrough, an inevitable question is sure to arise: why should Turkey go ahead with adopting the EU *acquis* if it cannot be sure that it will actually be admitted? After all, reforms in areas like public procurement and environment are often costly, either politically or in terms of investments required. “Turkish industry will not start to pay for something that has no guaranteed payback,” [Cengiz Aktar](#), chairman of the Department of EU Relations at Bahcesehir University, told ESI in November 2009. Why go on, therefore?

The question, quite simply, is the Turks’ to answer. Most of the *acquis*, even when it comes with a large price tag, is in Turkey’s general interest, signifying as it does a chance to modernise the Turkish economy and the public administration. (A same question could have been asked about the 1995 customs union, which has contributed to a dramatic and largely positive transformation of the Turkish economy.) Some of the *acquis*, however, may not be in Turkey’s general interest. Bearing this in mind, Turkey can play it *a la carte* until relevant chapters are opened, putting cost-intensive or inconvenient reforms on the back burner while making rapid progress in other areas.

In the meantime, Turkish civil society must make sure the Turkish government does not use the slowdown in the accession process as an excuse to forestall reforms opposed by powerful special interest groups. Public procurement reform and environmental regulation, to cite Aktar’s examples, are indeed challenging, even costly. As such, they may be opposed by business groups with links to the government or by heavy polluters. The first would fight to preserve a system that allows them to benefit from patronage networks and backroom deals; the second dread making the investments necessary to comply with EU environmental laws. Each would like nothing more than for Turkish politicians to protect the status quo and to repeat that reforms are not “worth it” unless they ensure EU accession. It is up to pro-EU public interest groups to dispute such logic – to argue, in other words, that reforms in public procurement and environmental protection are necessary not only for the sake of complying with EU regulations, but for the sake of making Turkey a more transparent economy, a more attractive tourist destination, and a better place to live.

The obstacles which have prevented the chapter on public procurement to be opened until now are a good case in point. While some in Turkey believe (erroneously) that Turkey would be required to open up its lucrative public procurement market to outsiders even before accession (which is a matter of negotiations and would only ever happen in a reciprocal manner), the opening benchmarks require only that it introduce a transparent regime for handling exceptions to the public procurement law. All Turkey really needs to do is list the exceptions currently in place. This would be of benefit for the Turkish economy and for Turkish taxpayers. The fact that in some chapters such opening benchmarks are intentionally kept confidential – thus allowing special interests in Turkey to pretend that they protect national interests – is something Turkish civil society or media would do well to challenge.

European prejudice and Islamophobia



Former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing. Photo: EU Council

The notion that Turkey's accession to the EU would be rendered impossible by European prejudice against a country of over 70 million Muslims began to gain currency long before the negotiation process formally got under way. On 8 November 2002, former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing used an [interview with *Le Monde*](#) to outline his views on Turkey's future in Europe. Admitting it, he argued, "would be the end of the European Union." "Turkey has a different culture, a different approach, a different way of life," he added. "Its capital is not in Europe, 95 percent of its population lives outside Europe. It is not a European country."

Giscard's statement generated a lot of debate at the time: first, because he had recently been appointed President of the Convention on the Future of Europe; and second, because, in the words of a senior EU official quoted by the *Washington Post* on 11 September 2002, he was "expressing indeed what many of our elite think." European leaders did not heed such warnings, however. At the end of 2004 (and again in 2005) the entire European Commission, two thirds of the European Parliament, and all 25 member states came out in favour of opening talks with Turkey. This was, and remains, proof enough that Ankara has more friends inside the EU than it sometimes admits.

The opening of talks did not end the debate over Turkish accession in important EU member states, however. The French campaign for the 2009 elections to the European Parliament became a showcase for opponents of Turkish accession. President Nicolas Sarkozy's governing UMP made Turkey a theme of its campaign, to the point of asking its leading candidates to issue formal declarations against Turkish accession. [On 5 May 2009 Sarkozy once again made clear his own views](#) on the subject when he told an audience in Nimes:

"Europe has to stop diluting itself in an enlargement without end ... There are countries, like Turkey, which share with Europe a part of their common destiny but which do not have a European vocation."

Days later [German Chancellor Angela Merkel, speaking](#) alongside Sarkozy during a campaign event in Berlin, suggested that the EU should offer Turkey a “privileged partnership” and called full membership “out of question”. Such a position went hand in glove with the policy of Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU), whose [manifesto for the 2009 European Parliament elections](#) called for a “phase of consolidation, during which a consolidation of the EU’s values and institutions should take priority over further EU enlargement.”

Merkel and Sarkozy may have been the most prominent opponents of Turkish accession during the 2009 campaign, but they were not alone. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders, campaigning on an anti-Muslim and anti-Turkey platform, took 17 percent. In Bulgaria, the Ataka party won 12 percent of the vote on the wings of its “No to Turkey in Europe” campaign. And in Austria, the Freedom Party, calling for “the West in the hands of Christians”, received 12.8 percent of the vote. (ESI has done a lot of work on Turkey debates in the EU, which is presented [here](#).)



Mehmet Ali Birand.

Photo: mehmetalibirand.com.tr

All of the above – as well as opinion polls that place support for Turkey’s EU accession at 19 percent in France, 16 percent in Germany and 31 percent in the EU as a whole – has inevitably fuelled speculation that the EU is prejudiced against Turkey and, as follows, determined to make its path to membership as difficult as possible. Taking stock of publicly articulated arguments against Turkish accession, [Mehmet Ali Birand, an influential columnist, also cites](#) the “unspoken” argument: “Turkey is a Muslim country. And Europe is not ready yet to accept a Muslim country in the EU.”

Charges of discrimination, double standards and shifting goalposts have been a staple of the Turkish debate on Europe ever since the accession process got under way. As early as December 2004, days before the historical EU summit that was to give the green light to accession talks with Ankara, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused](#) European leaders of insincerity. “We are not bringing any conditions to this ourselves. But we are seeing here that new rules are being introduced while the game is being played.” Five years later [he was to sense “something quite peculiar” about the EU process](#). “1959 was when we started our discussions with Europe. We are in 2009. Fifty years have passed and there is no other country that has had to wait for that long.” [In 2010 he told Euronews](#): “Unfortunately, some of the EU member states are not acting honestly … they are trying to corner Turkey with conditions that do not exist in the *acquis communautaire*.”



Istanbul Gay Pride Parade 2008. Photo: Wikipedia/leandrostr

However, much of what Turkish politicians describe as European prejudices against their country are real problems that have to be tackled. [Turkey's human rights record – though vastly improved over the past decade – remains dismal by European standards.](#) Even among the Balkan states, none fares worse than Turkey in terms of the number of cases before the European Court on Human Rights (Turkey was found [to have violated the Human Rights Convention](#) in 553 different cases from October 2009 to November 2010, compared to 24 for Croatia), restrictions on free speech, the number of children in prison ([2,460 as of July 2010](#)) and the situation of women (Turkey ranked 101st out of 110 countries in the UN's 2009 Gender Empowerment Measure and 126th out of 134 in the [2010 Global Gender Gap Index](#)).

Looking at the actual behaviour of the EU since 1999, one comes to a counterintuitive conclusion: that Turkey has often been given the benefit of the doubt. Rather than discriminated, it has often been favoured and courted. In 1999 it was given candidate status despite failing to meet the EU's human rights criteria. In 2004, despite only "sufficiently" meeting the Copenhagen political criteria, [it was allowed to open accession talks](#) – the only candidate country to be allowed such leeway. In Turkey's case, a positive trend, rather than the actual fulfilment of conditions, has seemed to suffice. Even Greece has so far refrained from holding Turkey's EU accession process hostage to the resolution of bilateral disputes (as it has done with regard to its northern neighbour, Macedonia).



Slovenian protest during the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute

Turkey's predicament, and its sense of being treated unfairly, is not unique. As former MEP Joost Lagendijk explained at a conference by the Heinrich Boll Stiftung in Istanbul in October 2010, in previous years, "the Greeks have blocked the Macedonians, the Dutch have blocked the Serbs, and the Slovenians have blocked the Croats." Joining the club has never been easy. Turkey is definitely not the first country to face difficulties in its EU accession process. Spanish and British accession hopes were delayed by France, with the UK's bid for membership vetoed not once, but twice. Austria could not sign even an association agreement for more than a decade in the 1960s, as it was blocked by Italy due to a dispute over South Tyrol. Croatia's ongoing EU bid has also suffered a series of setbacks. Until October 2009 Slovenia blocked more (14) chapters in the negotiations with Zagreb than the EU Council plus France have done in the talks with Turkey.

The Spanish example itself helps dispel the allegation that, as [Prime Minister Erdogan recently put it](#), and as many Turkish politicians like to repeat, "the EU has trifled with Turkey for the past 50 years and continues to do so."

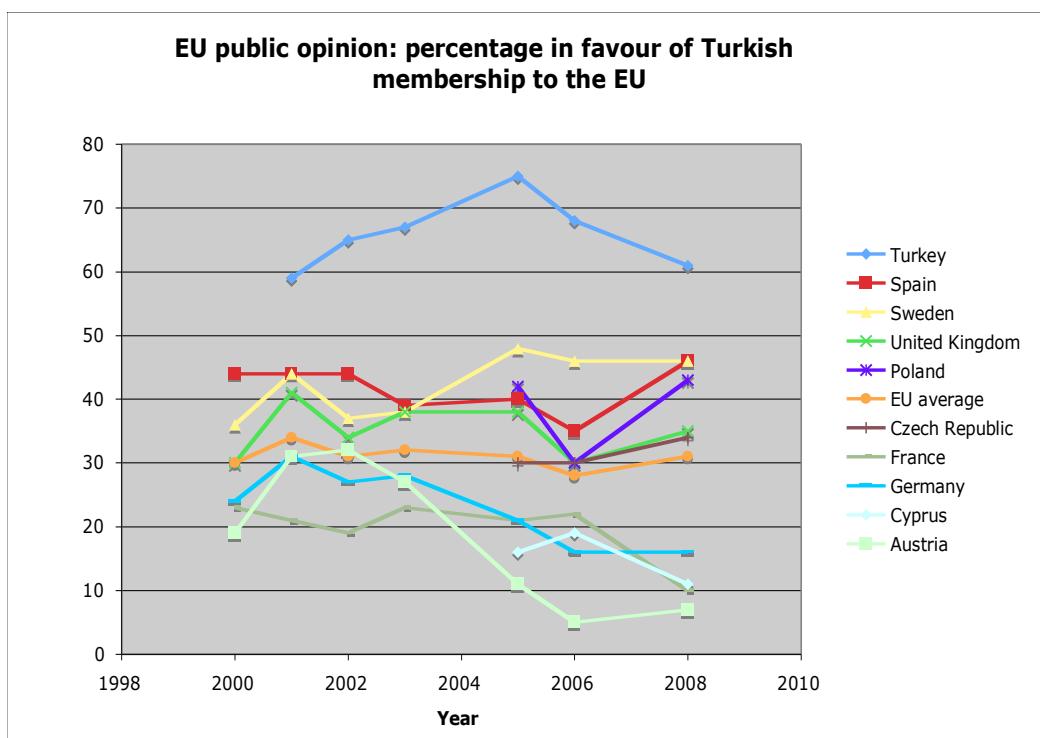
On 9 February 1962, three years after Turkey filed its application for associate membership to the European Economic Community, [the Spanish government petitioned Brussels](#) to "open negotiations for an associate agreement with a view to full membership." Spain was governed by a dictatorship under General Franco and its human rights record was dreadful. Understandably, any and all talk of its accession was put on hold for more than a decade. Despite the signing of a preferential trade agreement in 1970, it was not until Franco's death in 1975 – and Spain's subsequent democratisation – that the Community decided to place Spain on the track to membership. And it was not until 1986 that Spain actually joined.

European leaders ignored Spain's bid for accession in the 60s and 70s not out of any bias against the Spaniards but out of a firm conviction that a military dictatorship had no place at the European table. Likewise, they had every reason to put Turkey's membership aspirations

(including its 1987 application) in the deep freeze. For years, Turkey was in no shape whatsoever to enter the Community. It took four decades after the 1959 association agreement was signed – decades that brought four military interventions, fits of serious civil unrest, several economic crises and a bloody war in the Southeast – before Turkey and the EU could seriously entertain the possibility of full membership. Just as Spain before it, Turkey had to overcome a legacy of military rule, repression and violence before it could dream of entering the EU family.

Popular claims that Turkey has not received a fair hearing from Europe for fifty years are certainly one reason why most Turks today believe that their country will never enter the EU. Opinion polls suggesting that European public opinion is increasingly opposed to accession are another. However, what the polls show is a lot less obvious than is often supposed. According to the latest (2008) comprehensive [Eurobarometer](#) poll, 31 percent of EU citizens declare themselves in favour of Turkey's accession. This reflects neither a major drop nor a major increase in comparison to previous years. Support for Turkish membership has hovered around 30 percent since 2000. (See ESI's 2008 report [A Referendum on the Unknown Turk](#) about attitudes in Austria.)

Graph: EU public opinion on EU membership of Turkey



Finally, while public opinion cannot be underestimated or ignored, it is not, and should not be, the most important factor shaping the course of enlargement. As Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt put it in an [interview with ESI in November 2009](#),

"The EU project and its important components, ranging from the Euro to enlargement, have been the result of political leadership, not the result of a groundswell of love toward each other among different European nations. In fact, very little would have happened in the last 50 years without political leadership."

Has Turkey's Europeanisation come to a halt?



Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Photo: World Economic Forum

A widely shared view today is that just as the accession negotiations with the EU opened in 2005 Turkey stopped reforming.

Coming on the heels of the decision to award Turkey EU candidate status, the period between 2001 and 2005 has come to be known as "[the golden years](#)" of Turkey-EU relations. It was during that time that Turkey adopted a string of impressive democratic reforms, part and parcel of what experts have called the country's "silent revolution". The reform effort kicked into high gear after the 2002 elections, which saw the newly-formed AKP (Justice and Development Party) form Turkey's first single-party government in more than twenty years.

In 2005, however, just as the accession negotiations with the EU opened, the mood began to change. Talks with the EU began to sputter, and the torrent of legislation pushed through parliament in previous years turned to a trickle. At the same time, Turkey experienced a wave of attacks against minorities, numerous attempts by radical nationalist groups to silence critical writers through the use of the Penal Code (art. 301), a number of assassinations (including one carried out by members of the Turkish gendarmerie in 2005 in the majority-Kurdish town of Semdinli), and a return to violence in the country's southeast. (See ESI's 2008 Briefing: [Turkey's Dark Side: Party closures, conspiracies and the future of democracy](#).)



Amanda Paul, Analyst at the European Policy Centre in Brussels

This has fed the belief that Turkey's reform process has lost momentum. As [Olli Rehn told the European Parliament in 2009](#), "We have unfortunately witnessed a certain slowdown of political reforms in Turkey in recent years." "The reality is Turkey hasn't done much more than deliver lip service to the EU for a considerable length of time," [Amanda Paul, an analyst at the European Policy Centre \(EPC\), told EurActiv in November 2008](#). Other than circumscribing the power of the military, "an institution which [it] has always regarded as its most formidable political opponent," [wrote Istanbul-based British author Gareth Jenkins in 2009](#), "the AKP has made virtually no attempt to address any of the concerns listed in the [EU] Progress Report ... Their main concern is no longer to move the accession process forward; it is simply to keep it alive."

Turkey's transformation has not stopped, however. While fewer reforms have been passed, the process of political change, rather than "slowing down" after 2005, has shifted from a phase of legislating to a phase of partisan struggle over the meaning of the earlier reforms.

The first phase had been relatively smooth and strikingly consensual, with the government, the parliamentary opposition and the military leadership largely in agreement as to the goal of opening EU accession talks. However, even then the reforms carried out were incomplete. As observers warned (rightly), limits on free speech had not been altered – it was only the penalties that were made less harsh.



St George's church in Istanbul, home to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

The second phase, however, has been deeply political and everything but smooth. Here, civil society, political parties and independent media – all of them empowered by the first wave of reforms – have become ever more important, while the EU's direct influence has become less apparent. Europeanisation has turned into a domestic affair, fought over by domestic interests. Any serious reform takes time to take root: it involves not merely new legislation but changes in popular (and elite) attitudes. The EU reforms in Turkey were supposed to bring an end to a decades-long tradition of military tutelage. They were designed to encourage Turkish governments to tackle the many outstanding taboo issues of Turkish politics, including policies towards its Christian and Kurdish citizens. They required real shifts in power. They were bound to generate friction.

After 2005, Turkey's previous legislative reforms were put to a stress test. It was one thing for the government to affirm that authority had moved from the military to the civilian authorities – or to legislate greater tolerance for the Kurdish language – and quite another to defend such far-reaching changes in the face of increasingly determined opposition. It was one thing to assert that the parliament should control and the auditors audit military spending, and another to actually do it in the face of determined opposition from the army. It was one thing to declare Turkey a European democracy, and another to persecute military authorities prepared to carry out new interventions. As the Independent Commission on Turkey noted in a [recent report](#), “from 2007 onwards, the ruling AKP had to fight off multiple challenges from an ad hoc coalition of old guard opponents including the military, parts of the judiciary and the main opposition Republican People’s Party.”

And yet, on some of the most important structural problems of Turkish democracy it was in the period since 2005 that real breakthroughs occurred. [Yasemin Congar, editor in chief of the daily Taraf, told ESI in 2008](#) how the EU process empowered Turkey's reformers, both in government and in society:

“If Turkey wants to keep changing, and wants to keep becoming a more liberal and democratic society, we need that symbol of the EU ... The military is still a taboo, but now we are criticizing it, we are discussing it. We can tell the military to get out of politics and to do its job, and yes, we might be tried for it, but still we are doing it. And self-censorship on these issues is less and less powerful. That’s very important.”

The role and position of the armed forces is only one of the many taboo issues which have been tackled over the past few years. The fate of Turkey’s Armenian minority, past and present, is another. In November 2008 a group of intellectuals launched a signature campaign apologizing for the mass killing of Armenians during the “Great Catastrophe” of 1915. More than 30,000 Turks signed the online petition. It is a sign of the times that several liberal journalists and academics have begun to defy state doctrine by referring to the events of 1915 as genocide. (See ESI’s 2008 report: [Noah’s Dove Returns. Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide](#).)

In January 2009, [Turkish state television \(TRT\) launched the country’s first Kurdish-language TV channel](#) – something unthinkable just a few years ago. The government lifted private radio and television restrictions on broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, allowing 24-hour programming in Kurdish, Arabic, Georgian or Circassian. (To date, [14 TV and radio stations have received a license to broadcast in Kurdish, Zaza and Arabic](#).) This academic year, the [University of Mardin inaugurated a faculty of “living languages”](#), under which Kurdish courses are given. The government also launched an institutional dialogue with representatives of the Alevi community, highlighted by President Abdullah Gul’s visit to an Alevi prayer house (cemevi), the first by a Turkish president since Ataturk.

In August 2010 Turkey allowed an Orthodox religious service to be held at the Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, the first in nearly a century. A month later, it cleared the way for Armenian Christians to hold a service at the historic Akhtamar Church near Van, in Eastern Turkey. [The government also organised periodic high level meetings with non-Muslim communities](#) to address the problems facing them.



Sumela Monastery. Photo: Wikipedia Commons/Bjørn Christian Tørrissen

As the press officer of the Greek patriarchate, Father Dositeos, told ESI during a meeting in March 2010, no Turkish government had ever before solicited the advice of minority groups as regularly on their various concerns. In parliamentary debates there was open discussion about crimes committed by the Turkish state in the past, from the massacres against Alevi Kurds in Tunceli in the 1930s to the pressures against Istanbul Greeks in the 1950s. “They have chased members of various ethnicities out of this country,” [Prime Minister Erdogan said, referring to Turkey’s Christians, during a speech](#) in the Central Anatolian town of Duzce in May 2009. “What have we gained? This was a result of a fascistic mentality.”

Last but not least, on 12 September 2010 – the thirtieth anniversary of the 1980 military coup

– an impressive 77 percent of Turks turned out to vote in a referendum on a government-sponsored package of constitutional amendments. With 58 percent of the vote, the “yes” side prevailed. In doing so, it has embraced changes that will allow civilian courts to try military personnel (and prevent military courts from trying civilians), give parliament a greater say in appointing judges, remove the immunity enjoyed by the leaders of the 1980 coup, establish the institution of ombudsman to deal with problems between state institutions and citizens, and allow civil servants to go on strike. (According to an EU official, the Turkish side is said to have consulted Brussels “systematically” during the drafting of the latest batch of judicial reforms.)

As far as the EU perspective is concerned, the significance of the referendum is manifest. Not only are the new changes among those that the EU has demanded from Turkey for years; not only do they pave the way for an entirely new democratic constitution to replace the one bequeathed to Turks by the military leadership in 1982; not only do they show that the pro-reform constituency in Turkey still reaches across party lines: just as importantly, they prove, just as the other examples cited above, that the Turkish reform process is far from running out of steam.

Much remains to be done; much could have happened earlier; and in some areas (particularly in the field of freedom of expression, as measured by the number of journalists in court) there are setbacks compared to 2005. Yet the sequence of events does not suggest a reform process that has stalled. Turkey’s transformation did not stop in 2005; the process of political change, rather than slowing down, has shifted from a phase of legislating to a phase of intense struggle over the very meaning of earlier reforms.

Do Turks still care?



Modern Istanbul. Photo: flickr/Mizrak

The growing impression that European leaders are no longer willing to champion the cause of Turkish accession is mirrored by the equally popular notion that Turkey itself has lost interest in joining the Union. In this view the AKP government's diplomatic overtures to countries like Syria and Iran, combined with its recently virulent criticism of Israel, are signs that Turkey is turning away from the West in general and the EU in particular. "Erdogan understands that he doesn't stand a chance in Europe for the time being, and he is instead redirecting his energy toward the East," [wrote Bernhard Zand in a recent edition of *Der Spiegel*.](#)

During the last two years, a number of "turning points" were said to have delivered proof of Turkey's shift away from the West. One was the January 2009 incident in Davos, when Prime Minister Erdogan, furious with Israel for its invasion of Gaza, accused Israeli President Shimon Peres of "knowing well how to kill people". Another came at the end of May 2010, when Turkey responded with even greater rhetorical outrage after Israeli commandos killed nine Turks aboard the Gaza-bound Mavi Marmara. Yet another followed on 9 June 2010, when Turkey refused to back UN sanctions against Iran, voting against them instead of at least abstaining.

There is also a corresponding assumption in some quarters that a newly confident Turkey with a booming economy is getting ready to part ways with the EU accession process. In February 2010, [Asia Times reported](#) that "frustrated with perceived European insincerity, a minority in the AKP is arguing Turkey no longer needs the EU." Several months later, [Suat Kiniklioglu, a leading AKP deputy, told Joost Lagendijk](#) that Turkey no longer needed the EU anchor. "Its economy is strong enough to do without a union that is struggling with its own financial problems," wrote Lagendijk, paraphrasing Kiniklioglu, "and the reforms will continue because there are strong domestic forces behind them." Ali Bulac, an influential conservative

thinker, went a step further when he argued in [his column for Today's Zaman](#): “We don't need the EU to implement needed reforms. Let us decide what we need ... Europe is an old lady with no energy left ... Our route is obvious: the Muslim world, which includes Eurasia, the Middle East and Africa.” Among many Turks and Turkish policymakers, there is (again) a belief, as Cengiz Aktar told ESI in November 2009, “that the EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the EU – and that Turkey can go at it alone.”

Many observers point to the most recent [Transatlantic Trends Survey \(2010\)](#) published by the German Marshall Fund (GMF) to illustrate how much the mood has changed in Turkey: the GMF poll found that while in 2004 73 percent of Turkish respondents considered EU membership to be a good thing, by 2010 that number had dropped to 38 percent. This is then interpreted as strong evidence of “Turkey drifting apart from the West.” But is it really?

To begin with, it is useful to put such polling results in context. At a round-table held in February 2009 in Zagreb with the title “[Croatia: Tired of EU Reforms?](#)” a [Gallup poll](#) was presented which indicated that merely 29 (!) percent of Croatian citizens thought that EU membership was a good idea. Another survey put this number even lower, at 26 percent. Yet few people worried about Croatia’s “drift to the East”. The obvious explanation for these results was intense frustration with the EU accession process at a moment when Slovenia was blocking Croatia’s accession negotiations over a territorial dispute. As for Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia or Latvia, surveys in 2001 revealed a very similar mood. According to a [Eurobarometer survey from October 2001](#), only 33 percent of Estonians and Latvians, and 39 percent of Maltese, supported EU membership – this, a mere three years before all three joined the EU. There was also no shortage of articles analysing declining popular support for EU membership in Poland.



European Parliament, Strasbourg. Photo: Wikipedia Commons/inyucho

At the same time, anybody with a sense of Turkey’s recent history is aware that there is little that is new about deep-seated distrust of the intentions of both the West and the EU. In fact, compared to the statements made by Turkey’s leaders at the beginning of this decade, today’s “Euroscepticism” is mild. In 2002 Deputy Prime Minister and MHP party leader Devlet Bahceli stated that “the current slogan that EU membership is the only choice for Turkey is disgraceful and degrading for the Turkish nation.”² In 2002 Tuncer Kilinc, the secretary general of the then all-powerful National Security Council, stated at a conference that the EU was a “neo-colonialist force that is determined to divide Turkey” and suggested that Turkey would do better to search for new allies, including Iran and Russia. In 2002 retired officer Suat İlhan, who taught at the military academy for many years and headed military intelligence, published a book entitled *Why no to the European Union*, in which he wrote:

² Nergis Canefe, Tanil Bora, “The Intellectual Roots of Anti-European Sentiments in Turkish Politics: The Case of Radical Turkish Nationalism.” *Turkish Studies*.

“The opportunity for which European waited five hundred years to expel Turks from Europe and Istanbul has come; by no means we should miss this opportunity.” The deputy prime minister, the secretary general of the National Security Council, numerous retired and active military figures: these voices were not those of marginal people.

In the years around 2002 such rhetoric reached new intensity. Neo-nationalists revived ideas about Turkish exceptionalism, which had deep roots, evoking the imagery of the 1919-1922 War of Independence when the country was encircled by enemies. [In 2003, a report on Turkey by MEP Arie Oostlander](#) also noted that the dominant state philosophy of Kemalism, giving excessive power and role to the military and insisting on the homogeneity of Turkish culture, posed an enormous obstacle on Turkey’s road to EU accession. And yet, contrary to anybody’s expectations, Turkey was then on the eve of its “golden years” of EU-inspired reforms.

If a tradition of Euroscepticism has deep roots in Turkey, so does a commitment to Europeanisation. Despite the slowdown in the accession negotiations, Turkish leaders reiterate at every step that EU membership remains the country’s top foreign policy goal. [Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu underlines](#) that “full integration with the EU is and will remain the priority ... Membership in the EU is Turkey’s strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era.”



Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bagis and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.
Photo: Council of the EU

Far from throwing in the towel, Turkey has shown sustained commitment to the accession process over the past two years. In December 2008 it adopted a new [National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis](#), a 400-page document containing detailed information on the legal reforms necessitated by the EU process. In January 2009 it finally appointed a Minister of European Affairs and EU chief negotiator, Egemen Bagis, in a move welcomed by the European Commission. In July 2009 the Turkish Parliament adopted a new [law allowing for a significant staff increase in the Secretariat General for European Affairs \(EUSG\)](#), from 40 to 333 people. (The EUSG has been entirely restructured and now has a secretary general, 5 deputy secretary generals and 14 heads of departments, 9 of which are currently women.

Since late 2009 Volkan Bozkir, an experienced former diplomat and ambassador to Brussels, has been heading the EUSG.) In December 2009 [Bagis announced a decision](#) to install EU Contact Offices in all Turkish provinces. The negotiations with the European Union, [he says](#), are “the most important foreign policy issue for Turkey.”

There is little evidence that Turkey has begun to “shift away from the West”, as some commentators allege. Although it has improved relations with Muslim countries, including Iran and Syria, Turkey has also reached out to non-Muslim nations such as Armenia and Russia. And although it has clashed with the US and the EU on the Iranian issue, it continues to provide military support in Afghanistan and remains an invaluable go-between in Syria and Iraq. Numerous experts in Turkey and the EU, including Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu himself, have made the case that Turkey is carrying out the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy on the Europeans’ behalf. As [Davutoglu put it himself in late 2009](#), “Turkey’s intense diplomatic efforts are not an alternative but are laying the groundwork for Turkish membership in the EU.”

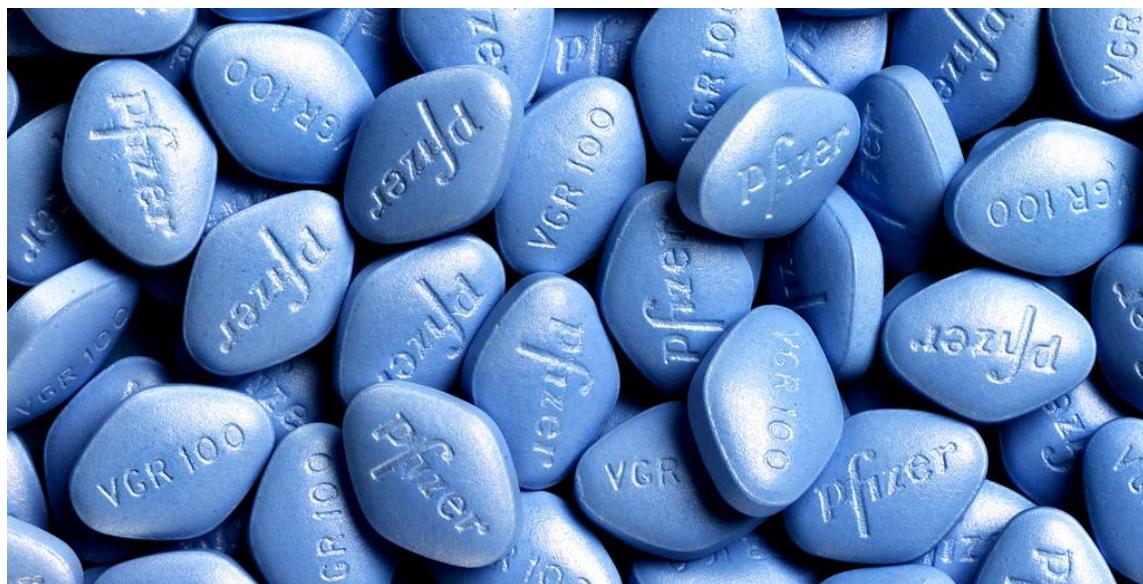
A sense of historical perspective might also be helpful. Turkish academic Kemal Kirisci has offered an excellent analysis of this change in a [recent essay on Turkey as a “trading state”](#). He contrasts “two eras” in Turkish foreign policy:

“The first one coincides with a Turkey that had serious internal problems and viewed its neighborhood through the lens of national security. Turkish foreign policy-making at the time was dominated by the military establishment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both institutions perceived threats to Turkey’s territorial integrity and unity emanating from various quarters around Turkey, including Northern Iraq. During this period, Turkey came close to a military confrontation with Greece in 1996, as well as with Syria in 1998. Furthermore, Turkey threatened Cyprus in 1997 with military action if Russian S-300 missiles were to be deployed on the island. There were also threats of use of force made against Iran, and relations with Russia were particularly strained. Relations with an important part of the Arab world were foul, aggravated by an exceptionally intimate military relationship with Israel. The mood of the foreign policy-makers was probably best captured by a leading figure in Turkish diplomacy, Sukru Elekdag, a retired ambassador and former deputy undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He advocated that Turkey should prepare itself to fight “two and a half wars” simultaneously against Greece, Syria, and the PKK.”

The second era is marked by a focus on economic opportunities:

“Turkish foreign policy in the last couple of years has increasingly been shaped by economic considerations – such as export markets, investment opportunities, tourism, energy supplies and the like. Foreign policy has become a domestic issue, not just for reasons of democratisation, identity and civil society involvement, but also because of employment and wealth generation. Possibly the best indicator of this is the sensitivity of Turkish financial markets to a host of foreign policy issues, ranging from relations with the EU to expanding relations with Northern Iraq.”

Viagra for the accession process – the matter of visa



For all the exaggerated and misplaced accusations of the EU's discriminatory policies vis-à-vis Turkey, some are well-founded. One example is the EU's decision to deny Turkish citizens a clear road forward towards visa free travel to Europe. This is also problematic in light of previous commitments made to Turkey under the Association Agreement.

Of all the candidate and potential candidate countries, Turkey remains the only one today without an official EU roadmap towards visa free travel. (See ESI's comprehensive site on visa free travel at www.whitelistproject.eu.) Such a roadmap sets out some 50 conditions in the fields of document security, border control and the fight against illegal migration, organised crime and corruption, which a country needs to meet to qualify for visa-free travel) Although their countries have not even begun accession negotiations, Serbs, Macedonians and Montenegrins have been travelling to the EU without a visa since late 2009. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania will follow before the end of the year, having completed the required ambitious agenda of internal security reforms outlined in the Commission's "visa roadmap". Turkey, five years into its accession talks, has yet to be offered the same. Making progress in this field could go a long way to restore some of the confidence lost in recent years.



Western Balkan citizens celebrating the fall of the Schengen Wall

Until recently there was a good reason – the absence of an EU-Turkey readmission agreement – for withholding a visa roadmap from Turkey. It is only now that protracted negotiations, launched in 2003, have been concluded. (A text is now almost finalised. It still needs to be approved by the EU member states and then initialled, signed and ratified before it can enter into force.) Such an agreement was a precondition for the Western Balkan countries to receive a visa roadmap. It is now a precondition for the EU's Eastern Partner countries to receive a visa liberalisation process.

Under the readmission agreement, Turkey will be obliged to take back Turkish nationals found to be residing illegally in an EU state, as well as irregular third-country nationals and stateless persons found to have entered the EU via Turkey. For Turkey – a major transit country for illegal migrants from Asia, Africa and Arab countries – agreeing to such an agreement is no small step. Turkey has had to improve border management, set up reception centres for returned third-country and stateless citizens, and negotiate bilateral readmission agreements with the countries of origin (it is currently in talks with Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia, Macedonia, Georgia, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Russia, Uzbekistan).



Illegal crossing of the border between Turkey and Greece. Photo: Mathias Depardon/UNHCR

For the Western Balkans, the readmission agreements were a stepping stone. Once they were signed, the EU launched a visa liberalisation process with the five Western Balkans countries, opening visa dialogues and handing out the visa roadmaps a few months later.

What follows from this is clear. At a time when Turkish citizens are desperate to see new signs of commitment and goodwill from Europe, the EU must offer Turkey a roadmap for lifting visa restrictions as soon as the readmission agreement is signed. Turkish politicians could then work on meeting precise conditions and tackling – once and for all – all the factors that continue to produce high numbers of Turkish asylum seekers and a slew of judgements against Turkey by the European Court for Human Rights.

A visa roadmap would represent a politically attractive agenda for reform. It would play to the shared interest of both the EU and the candidate state – to improve cooperation in the fight against organised crime and illegal migration. Although very demanding in terms of the reforms they necessitate, the conditions of the roadmap are also relatively precise. In the case of the Balkans the visa roadmap process has proven to be EU conditionality at its best: strict but fair. Over the past few years, the roadmaps offered to the Balkan countries have become a

very important part of the accession process, allowing the aspiring EU members to make tangible progress in a specific field that matters a lot to citizens. Most importantly, the roadmaps have managed to deliver what they promised and – thanks to the increased cultural exchange triggered by visa-free travel – to sustain the pro-European dynamic in the region.

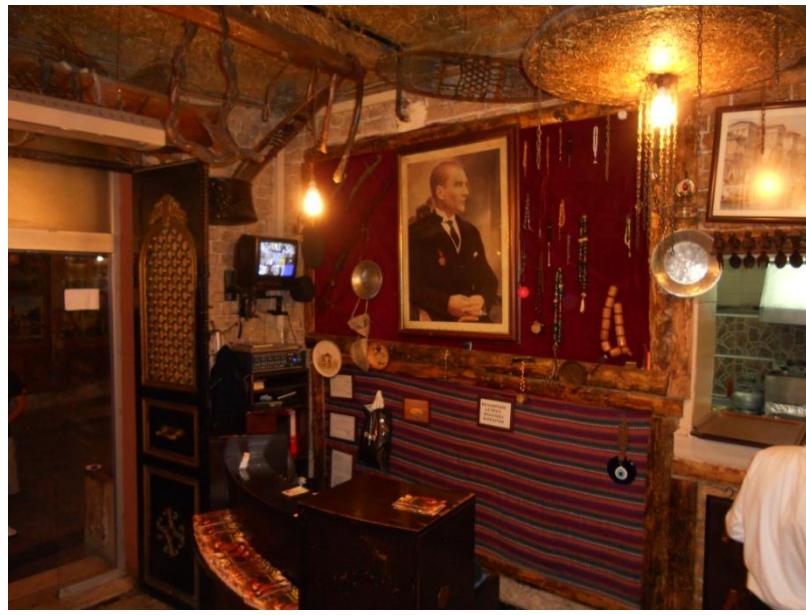
An agenda for the long haul – Towards 2023



Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule. Photo: Council of the EU 2010

The [EU-Turkey Negotiating Framework](#), adopted by the European Council in October 2005, stipulates that a qualified majority of member states may suspend the accession negotiations with Turkey. Yet, it also says, this may only take place “in the case of a serious and persistent breach in Turkey of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded.” In other words, the trigger has to come from Turkey. Barring a systematic crackdown on the freedom of expression or a military takeover, the EU cannot unilaterally stop a process to which it has committed itself under the Negotiating Framework.

This should soothe Turkish anxieties, but only to a certain extent. Although far more stable today than it was a decade ago, Turkey is still not immune to political earthquakes. In fact, it narrowly averted one as recently as in 2008, when the country’s Constitutional Court came within a single vote of banning the ruling AKP. The closure case, if successful, would have placed the accession process in more danger than any other event over the past decade. In the summer of 2008, fears that the EU was readying for a decision to suspend the negotiations were, for once, well founded.



The Kemalist legacy still dominates Turkey. Photo: Sena Maric/ESI

Opposition to Turkey's EU membership exists both in the EU and in Turkey. This ought to come as no surprise. Coming from a proud and fiercely independent country, only one century removed from being an empire that stretched from the Adriatic to the Persian Gulf, some Turks even ask why they should pool so much sovereignty with a Union that – as many of them see it – is prejudiced towards their culture, their nation, and their religion. Europeans, meanwhile, wonder whether and when Turkey will meet the EU's standards for entry. They ponder the prospect of a Union that might one day border Iraq, Iran, and Syria. They also realise that an EU that includes Turkey (and the smaller Western Balkan states) would be a very different institution: by 2023 it would have some 600 million inhabitants, including perhaps 100 million European Muslims. For some, this is a good reason to support this visionary enlargement; for others, such a change is above all a cause for concern. In any case, it is clear that such a transformation can only proceed slowly and will require sustained efforts to make the case that accession would be both in Turkey's and in the EU's interest.

Such efforts are not only Europe's to make. So long as Turkey does not regress on the path to democracy or take to populist sabre-rattling and nationalist hysteria, its EU perspective will remain intact. However, by painting European opposition to Turkish accession as essentially an expression of Western Islamophobia, accusing the EU of double standards, and blaming it, and nothing else, for the slowdown in negotiations – all while insisting that Turkey no longer needs Europe to grow and reform – the Turkish government runs the risk of boxing itself and future governments into a corner. The resentment against the EU that such rhetoric creates threatens to feed into popular expectations, even demands that Turkey walk away from the negotiations, pride intact. With popular support for accession in Turkey falling (from 71 to 47 percent between 2004 and 2010, according to [Eurobarometer](#)), this is becoming a serious concern for those who fear that the Turkish-European marriage could become dysfunctional.



Michael Emerson, Centre for European Policy Studies.
Photo: Centre for European Policy Studies

Whatever their pace, however, the negotiations will not unravel on their own. As long as Turkey takes a rational view of the benefits of the accession process, the negotiations cannot stop. As [Michael Emerson suggested](#) already back in December 2006, Turkey should “play it long and cool” and “continue alignment on the EU acquis unilaterally, with priority for those elements that are clearly useful for Turkey’s own economic and political system.”

Turkey has followed such advice thus far. It is very likely to continue doing so in the coming years as well. It is thanks to its doggedness and its commitment to the EU process that Turkey is a much more democratic and economically resilient place than a decade ago. What drives the enlargement process, after all, is interests, not grand speeches and blue-eyed idealism. And while nobody can look into the future, for now it is reasonable to expect there to be a lot more life in the Turkish accession story.

ANNEX I: About the ESI Schengen White List Project



As far back as 2003, the EU pledged to begin discussions with the governments of the Western Balkans on the reforms necessary to lift the visa requirement for entering the Schengen area. This obligation was imposed on the region in the 1990s when war ravaged former Yugoslavia and when Albania was mired in chaos.

It took five long years for the promised discussions to begin. In the meantime, Macedonia became an official candidate for EU membership, while Albania's, Bosnia and Herzegovina's, Montenegro's and Serbia's "potential candidate" status was repeatedly underlined. Their citizens, however, continued to have to obtain a visa to visit the EU.

Applying for a Schengen visa is time-consuming, costly and stressful. People throughout the region perceived the visa requirement as personal rejection, unable to reconcile it with the offer of a future in the EU. Pro-EU reformers felt discriminated; businesspeople despaired over the limitations that the visa obligation imposed on their companies' growth potential; young people felt imprisoned.

In 2008, the EU at last formulated a series of demanding requirements, assigning concrete "visa roadmaps" for each country – visa-free travel being the reward for meeting these benchmarks.

The goal of ESI's Schengen White List Project was to contribute to the abolition of the visa restrictions for the Western Balkans on the basis of this approach. We wanted to make sure that the EU-led process was merit-based: strict but fair. This was the key message of the declaration made by the Schengen White List Project advisory board, chaired by former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato and by ESI.

The process had to be transparent. The citizens of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia had to know what had been asked of their governments in order to hold them accountable for progress (or lack thereof). The European public deserved to know about the far-reaching reforms that the Western Balkan countries were undertaking to keep the EU safe and to prevent illegal migration, organised crime and terrorism.

For this reason, ESI collected all relevant documents and placed them online. We published declarations, newsletters, all the roadmaps, the activity and progress reports sent by Western Balkan governments to the European Commission, as well as the Commission's assessments.

We also put together a special website: www.whitelistproject.eu. Here, one can find excerpts from all the relevant EU policy documents. There is also a detailed description of the EU legislative process that must be completed before a country can enjoy visa-free travel to the EU.

At the end of 2009 three Western Balkan countries – Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – finally obtained visa free travel. Bosnia and Albania will follow at the end of 2010. At the time of writing, Kosovo and Turkey remain the only EU candidates and potential candidates in South East Europe without a visa roadmap.

The Schengen White List Project was supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

ANNEX II: ESI Turkey Research since 2005

Since 2004 ESI has aimed to address a growing need for empirical and field-based analysis of Turkey and to contribute to a better understanding of the country's dynamics.

Reports and discussion papers:

- [The Great Debate - Germany, Turkey and the Turks. Part 1: Intellectuals](#) (October 2010)
- [Armenia-Turkey: A Difficult Rapprochement](#) (2010)
- [Noah's Dove Returns. Armenia, Turkey and the Debate on Genocide](#) (April 2009)
- [Turkey's dark side. Party closures, conspiracies and the future of democracy](#) (April 2008)
- [A referendum on the unknown Turk? Anatomy of an Austrian debate](#) (January 2008)
- [Sex and Power in Turkey. Feminism, Islam and the Maturing of Turkish Democracy](#) (June 2007)
- [The German Turkey debate under the grand coalition](#) (October 2006)
- [Austria's October elections Implications for the Turkey debate](#) (October 2006)
- [Beyond Enlargement Fatigue? The Dutch debate on Turkish accession](#) (April 2006)
- [Islamic Calvinists. Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia](#) (September 2005)

Picture stories:

- [Turkish foreign policy: from status quo to soft power](#) (April 2009)
- [Germans and Turks - Striking facts](#) (November 2008)
- [The battle for Turkey's Soul. Party closures, gangs and the state of democracy](#) (April 2008)
- [A referendum on the unknown Turk? Anatomy of an Austrian debate](#) (January 2008)
- [A Century of Feminism in Turkey](#) (June 2007)
- [15 Facts About Turkey](#) (June 2007)
- [The Dutch debate on Turkey](#) (April 2006)
- [The Austrian debate on Turkey](#) (September 2005)