



## Turkey's EU membership discussed most in the Netherlands

**Gila Benmayor** Turkish Daily News

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If you had taken a look at yesterday's newspapers you would have seen Turkey's chief European Union negotiator Ali Babacan dismissing claims that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has entered a period of inactivity concerning the EU by responding with "We are working with enthusiasm."

"We will ignore all political ploys and populist policies during the negotiation process," he added. No matter how much Babacan may claim that the negotiation process is proceeding smoothly, public polls are out there for all to see.

In 2003, 68 percent of Turks wanted their country to become an EU member. These days, this rate is around 57 percent. The ruling party is gradually becoming invisible between the EU vision and the Turkish public.

So what's the latest from the EU? From time to time, we see the studies conducted by the Eurobarometer polling group for the European Commission, but there are very few detailed studies on individual countries.

One such detailed study was conducted by the European Stability Initiative (ESI). Last year, the ESI had attracted a lot of attention with its study on the "Islamic Calvinists." This time around, it concentrated on the Netherlands.

So, what do the Dutch think about Turkey? You can find the answers in ESI's study, "The Turkey Debate in the Netherlands," which was published only recently.

The Netherlands is the country where our potential membership is discussed the most. One reason is the fact that nongovernmental organizations are very strong in that country. Turkey is being discussed on almost every platform. Political parties, universities and the media join in this huge debate. The discussions range from Turkey's Islamic identity to its rural development.

We also learned the fact that the Netherlands is the country where the most research on Turkey is being done. In other words, those who discuss Turkey have a huge store of information to base their arguments on.

If you are curious about ESI's report, visit [www.esiweb.org](http://www.esiweb.org). ESI will carry out a similar study in Austria soon. And then will follow reports from Germany, France and Denmark. In countries that don't officially oppose Turkey's membership, like Britain, Italy and Spain, this research will not be conducted.

### The East's Boston, Ayvalık

It appears some used to call Ayvalık, where I spent the first week of my summer holiday, the "East's Boston." I learned from the book "Urban Ayvalık," given to me as a present, that Ayvalık was issued an "autonomy ferman" from the sultan at one time. The town utilized this autonomy, and, of course, its olives and olive oil, to develop economically. Economic development naturally boosted the region's social and cultural development.

In the 1820s it was one of the most famous cities of the Mediterranean due to its commercial importance, wealth and cultural heritage. The Ayvalık Academy, opened in 1803, was renowned for its pupils who were taught philosophy, physics, linguistics and mathematics in ancient Greek. In 1889, Ayvalık's population was 20,000. It had 22 olive oil factories, 30 soap workshops, 80 windmills, six pharmacies and many schools.

So, what's left of this past success? I believe Ayvalık must be one of the least spoiled regions in the country, especially Cunda Island. Buildings, compared to the Black Sea region, are very few.

The olive oil industry, an ancient legacy, is as strong as ever. It is the olive oil capital of the country. Without doubt, the best olive oil in the country is produced here. Most importantly, the olive oil policy of the country is formulated here.