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**THE EU AND TURKEY IN A TWISTED MARRIAGE:  
CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FURTHER  
ENLARGEMENT**

*Abstract*

This essay is an effort to investigate the principal challenges associated with further enlargement of the European Union. The specific focus of the analysis is the case of Turkey as a real dilemma for the EU. The eastward expansion of the European Union poses multi-dimensional concerns. These concerns relate to -political, - economic, - cultural and – geostrategic delicate questions that are perceived as crucial issues for the Union. However, it should be pointed that this is a game that cannot be played by a single actor such as the EU. It also depends on how Turkey will play the game of integration which however is principally led by the Union. Considering this, the paper is organised in four main sections. The first section introduces - political challenges from the EU enlargement towards Turkey. The second section introduces -economic challenges and it is followed by the two last sections with -geostrategic and -identity issues. All the questions raised above are important points of the EU enlargement debate, but in the case of Turkey, the question of identity is always as important because it is related to a number of diversities that focus on the religious faith of this country. The decision for Turkey's accession to the European Union is a sensitive test for the future of the Union, but the challenges are also real. However, expansion is not impossible if the integration factors do not value the play by the actors as zero. The paper ending with some brief conclusions, where the question of identity is always as important because it is related to a number of diversities that focus on religious belief.

***Keywords:** European Union, European Culture, Europe of Cultures, Turkey, political challenges, economic challenges, geostrategic challenges, identity / cultural challenges*

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### **Introduction**

Many times, Turkey - EU negotiations have been overshadowed for different reasons. The EU has been quite reluctant - and still seems so -. In the effort to shed light towards the challenges associated with further enlargement of the European Union headed for Turkey, this paper is organised in four main sections. The first section introduces -political challenges from the EU enlargement, the second section introduces -economic challenges, followed by the two last sections with -geostrategic and -identity issues.

### **Political Challenges**

In political terms, the shape of the Union is very important and the EU finds itself in the crossroads of widening or deepening. It might sound superficial that the decision for a wider Union undermines the possibility of a deeper integration among the old member states but anyways it is clear that further widening will significantly influence it. It means that the federalist dream will be seriously challenged by increasing the diversity of political interests and views within the Union which might be much harder to contain a single framework.

A very important political issue is the decision-making impact of Turkey into the EU-27 and the European Union capacity to act according the new power distribution among the member states. The redistribution and a new balance of power are decisive for the Turkish EU acceptability.

Of course, enlargement itself would change the EU decision - making process but the case of Turkey represents a delicate case because of its particularities that will be further discussed.

Turkish membership is calculated to have a big impact on the power distribution among member states of the EU. This impact can be technically evaluated but also normatively evaluated because partially it is on the basis of this evaluation that Turkey`s European integration depends.

The decision-making in EU is a complex process between institutions but the most relevant dynamic that needs to be taken in consideration is the decision-making procedure in the European Council and the procedure in the Council of Ministers. This shows clearly how Turkey will change actual balances.

The European Council as a body which "provides the Union with the necessary impetus for its development" takes (nearly all of) its decisions by unanimity or consensus. Actually, the Treaty of Lisbon, Article 15(4) of the amended Treaty on European Union (TEU) presents the main rule for decision-making. Article 15(4) (Lisbon Treaty): 4. Except where the Treaties provide otherwise, decisions of the European Council shall be taken by consensus. In terms of its potential decision-making capacity, it is evident that this institution is very affected by enlargement. This is because the larger and more diverse the membership of the European Council becomes the more difficult it is likely to be to find consensus (Stephanou, 96). Individual members of the Council and many other members of EU organs tend to vote in the national interest of their home countries. The representation of Turkey interests according this rationale might sharpen the division. This dynamic derives by the strong nationalistic orientation of Turkey which might have also deeper implications.

Further enlargement of the EU towards Turkey would bring a redistribution of power in the Council of Ministers also. Lisbon Treaty confirmed that the EU is based on democratic principles. New decision-making rules were presented as solutions for solving the problems of legitimacy, democratic representation and transparency bringing answers for the democratic deficit.

Decision-making in the Council of Ministers taking place under Lisbon Treaty voting rules will happen according the double majority (qualified majority) voting system. The bigger the country's population, the more votes it has, but the numbers are weighted in favour of the less populous countries: However, up to now when the Council votes on the basis of a simple qualified majority, the number of votes for each Member State is predetermined by the Treaty itself (from 29 votes each for the four largest Member States to 3 votes for the smallest). The system of simple qualified majority voting will continue until November 2014. From 2014 it will be different: it will then be a double majority so that, in order to be adopted, an act must have the support of at least 55 % of the EU Member States and at least 65 % of the population of the EU (Facts from Lisbon Treaty and from previous Treaties). This does not change the principle behind the argument that Turkey will reallocate power because of the population. Actually, under the Nice treaty voting rules, Qualified Majority Voting in the Council of Ministers determines the distribution of power among member states and Turkey would be the second-most powerful member state in the EU. Under the Nice rules, the power differences among the member states with populations of more than

50 million would be small (BALDWIN and WIDGRÉN 1). In fact, Turkey's population is more than 80 million. With further enlargement, the balance of power between the countries will significantly change. Because of Turkey integration, the EU will face not only a change of numbers but also a de facto re-distribution of the power which will have a great impact in decision-making. This redistribution of power in the European Union is a very important factor that might decrease the acceptability of Turkey.

Long and difficult negotiations at the 2000 Nice summit were dedicated to the working out of how many votes each country should have to avoid the situation where a group of small countries could work against the big countries and vote them down, even though the small countries together represent fewer people than the big ones. Difficulties were also presented in the case of Lisbon Treaty where the double majority (qualified majority) voting formula was worked out. Taking in consideration the population of Turkey it is obvious that this country will have a strong voice in EU decision-making process because the rules related to the demographic factor. On the other side if Turkey would play "strategic games" it would not be very difficult to create different "winning alliances" moving the actual allocation of EU power. Because of the demographic factor, different schemes related to numbers and "formulas" can be created and thus the results might be completely different from now. This might turn to be a very delicate issue.

Furthermore, the Council of Ministers adopts also the unanimity procedure in order to take its decisions but as various institutional reforms have taken effect, QMV has almost replaced unanimous voting. According to the unanimity system everyone has to be in agreement. It is less effective for developing Community policies because of the veto risk. It makes QMV the most common method of decision-making, used especially in most sensitive issues. It might be deduced that Turkey will have a serious impact in the decision-making process under QMV in the Council of Ministers but anyways it cannot be denied that under unanimity there will be also problems. To understand this dynamic, we must evaluate and take in consideration that there are interrelated background factors which divide Turkey and EU thus creating a gap from which the decision-making process will suffer. Under the background factors "marque" are included issues that give Turkey a different tune from EU.

Included in the range of political challenges, despite decision-making procedures in the

European Council and the Council of Ministers, the Commission might experience difficulties in its work. The increasing number of actors will complicate the process of agenda setting and at the same time an increased number of nationalities in the Commission administration and services will create further efficiency difficulties.

Another legal and political argument which needs to be emphasised is that enlargement increases the administrative heterogeneity in the EU to such an extent that it is likely to challenge the notion of homogeneous implementation and application of rules and regulations (SVERDRUP, 2). This argument is valid for the EU enlargement towards Turkey especially taking in consideration the fragile democracy and doubtful institutional balances in the country.

### **Economic Challenges**

On the economic point of view, one of the most important challenges of the enlargement towards Turkey is to secure a financial framework for this “sensitive” enlargement process. The financial framework should provide means for growth and prosperity for Turkey as a member of EU, but at the same time it should not “drain” the other member states and the European economy. It is a difficult case itself and what might make it more difficult is the economic crisis and its long-term effects in the Union. Economic objections to Turkish membership are based mostly on the relative underdevelopment of Turkey's economy compared to the economies of EU members and Turkey's high rate of population growth.

Economic effects of Turkey accession to the EU should be evaluated taking in consideration its size, per capita income and dependence on agriculture (Flam, 341). These factors show that Turkey might become the largest recipient of transfers from the EU budget.

The economic and social role of agriculture in Turkey is very important. Considering the size of Turkish agriculture and the impact that it will have on the Union budget, it is clear that agriculture will be one of the most important issues in terms of absorption capacity. It is also clear that Turkey would be eligible for significant support under the Common

Agricultural Policy including the rural development policy. This would require a deep recalculating of EU funds and changing of actual balances in “- who - takes - what”.

Turkey’s low level of GDP per capita, the wide regional disparities and economic imbalances that have kept the country locked in a high inflation spiral, would require significant support from the Structural and Cohesion Funds over a long period of time. It is a real challenge for the Union in terms of the cohesion policy because of the need to reallocate a considerable percent of funds:

“On the basis of the current data and eligibility criteria, the entire territory of Turkey would be eligible for assistance under Structural Funds as well as for assistance under the Cohesion Fund.” (ANDOURA, 4)

Turkey would lower the EU average GDP level and a big problem for the EU acceptability of Turkey would be the fact that a number of regions of EU-27 actually benefiting from Structural Funds support would lose their eligibility upon Turkey’s accession.

Another issue that is perceived as a potential serious problem is the fact that Turkey's already large population is expected to have a bigger growing rate in the coming years. Amongst others, the result would be having too many Turkish workers for too few jobs in the Union because of free labour movement among member states. This would create economic troubles and of course social problems of integrating those workers into EU.

### **Geostrategic Challenges**

There are a number of obstacles for the enlargement of the EU towards Turkey in terms of foreign policy and in a geostrategic perspective. Enlargement towards Turkey would bring the EU borders near instable neighbours. EU borders with the Middle East, the Black Sea and Caucasus will raise a lot of sensitive issues. This location will shift the Union’s boarders to the South East and increase the Union’s range of fears and problems related to these regions.

Potential obstacles in changing EU borders derive from the fact that it would be very difficult to manage and control such extensive land borders and cost lines meanwhile Turkey is perceived as quite hesitant to align itself to EU positions on issues which considers that interfere with its security interests. The EU doubts and relative lack of interest in Turkey can be explained in part also by the fact that the Union is not willing to take an active and direct

global role in areas of conflict, such as the Middle East. If this would be the case, an active global role would require large investments in many directions but actually the costs would be bigger than the benefits. This would put the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy in a different light which actually is a big challenge. So, the question is: Is the EU ready to be involved in those issues? As a matter of fact, except in the areas within its immediate neighbourhood, the EU has proved its will to delegate responsibilities to the United States, thereby withdrawing from Unity involvement. These are obstacle elements that reduce Turkey acceptability for the European Union. Another issue closely related with the previous discussion is the question of immigration of third-country nationals to the EU through Turkey. Turkey's eastern borders are porous and quite difficult to protect. Problematic areas would use Turkey as a transit country to the EU. This challenge is further complicated by the fact that public opinion in the EU has in general been lukewarm towards enlargement precisely because they fear massive immigration and a weakening of border controls (APAP, CARRERA and KIRISICI)

Moreover, two specific issues continue to complicate the larger picture: Turkey's disturbed relationship with its European neighbour Greece and domestic security policy given priority over external diplomacy, even if the latter suffers as a result. This can be seen as the intrusion of domestic security issues into the international scene.

The antagonism between Greece and Turkey has a long history, and the identification of each other as the national threat is still fixed on each national perception. The most serious issue between the two countries is their dispute over the island of Cyprus, which dates back to 1974. The triangle of still unresolved problems between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus would have large implications in almost all EU internal and external policies and also on decision-making mechanisms.

Turkish foreign policy has been formulated within a spectrum of political realism, with more than potential use of military power, threat of war and coercion. Actually, this is the very basic element that distinguishes Turkey from other EU member states. It is a tendency that contributes to set Turkey outside acceptable limits by the EU mode of international behaviour.

Any challenge to the 'indivisible unity of the Turkish state' is still likely to see domestic security policy given priority over external diplomacy. So, the Kurdish threat of armed protests or any kind of rebellion is a reason that might set Turkey out of - a "normal" behaviour.

During July 2003 antiterrorism legislation was amended by the parliament to drop a clause covering "propaganda against the indivisible unity of the state" as a terrorist offence. However, "propaganda encouraging the use of terrorist methods still carries potential sentences up to five years, insults to state and threats to its unity could carry a six months' sentence (LAKE, 94).

What is very sensitive is that armed forces persist in attachment to the Prime Minister Office rather than to the ministry of defence (Lake 96) and many people are used of thinking of Turkey as a semi-military regime. The problem stems from the fact that the EU is not and cannot operate as a conflict resolution mechanism. It would be costly for all the EU mechanisms to get involved to resolve this kind of problems and offer "paternal" support. To Europeans these elements constitute a negative input for the integration equation because all this is perceived as a further challenge to afford not only in terms of the external policy but as issues with deeper implications.

### **Identity\Cultural Challenges**

Another set of arguments that put a range of new challenges in front of the EU, derive from the identity issues. EU enlargement policy cannot be treated only as a form of foreign policy tool but it should be seen more widely.

Both discursively constructs and essential approaches towards identity, lead to the creation of the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders' of Europe through varying dynamics between them. Any kind of identity is reinforced by the existence of contrasting identities that provide a defining point of reference. Scholars suggest that a European identity is reinforced by the existence of two powerful "others" or "outsiders". - One in the west and one in the east. So, on one side



we have the United States that provides a powerful “other” for the European political identity in order to be defined, and on the other side we have an Islamic culture and the identification of Turkey as basically a Middle Eastern Muslim society.

However, you define it, real or perceived political and cultural differences between Turkey and European Union have led to the same result. They undermine Turkey’s EU application and strongly perpetuate its image as a European outsider. So, the doubts related to the integration derive from the position that Turkey is outside Europe and trying to get in.

According to a large number of sceptics Turkey does not meet the “nowhere defined standards” of what it means to be European. It is very difficult to agree upon such a delicate issue. Turkish political leaders accuse Europe of trying to form a “Christian club,” from which Muslim countries would be excluded.

“The media, especially in France and Germany, writes of a “clash of civilizations” between Turkey and Europe. Pope Benedict XVI once said (Bencivenga, 2005):

“The roots that have formed Europe are those of Christianity . . . Turkey is founded on Islam . . . Thus, the entry of Turkey into the EU would be anti-historical” (DIXON, 638).

European officials put it very bluntly: ‘Turkey is . . . too poor . . . too Muslim, too harsh, too culturally different, too everything’ (HUNTINGTON 146).

The decision of Turkey’s integration puts at stake also competing visions of what the European Union will be in the future and how Turkey might or might not match with those expectations. Would the Turkish accession create risks for the European “civilizational project” if there is one, and further more would this accession reduce Europe to a simple customs union?

Those are dilemmas that strongly raise wider doubts on the enlargement as the “key” of the Union future. In fact, the more Turkey fulfils Copenhagen political and economical criteria and demonstrates will to be closer to Europe, the more uncertain the ending becomes. In a certain way it is also because the cultural differences between Turkey and the EU are

perceived essentially. According to this vision the cultural distinctions among people are highly important and permanently enrooted. This issue might result as the Achilles' heel for the enlargement.

### **Conclusions**

EU enlargement is a sensitive question but the case of Turkey puts it in a real crossroad. Turkey's accession constitutes a set of challenges in four main inter-related dimensions. The set of problems that accompany enlargement towards Turkey are political, economic, geostrategic and identity related.

Politically, the decision-making impact of Turkey into the EU-27 and the European Union capacity to act according the new power distribution among the member states is decisive for the enlargement and the Turkish EU acceptability.

Economic effects of Turkey accession to the EU should be evaluated taking in consideration its size, per capita income and dependence on agriculture (FLAM 341). These factors show that Turkey might become the largest recipient of transfers from the EU budget. So, the implications are not only deriving from a new political power balance but are also accompanied by a budget redistribution which is a strong factor that reduces further Turkey acceptability.

The geostrategic challenges at the same time are very important. They mainly include changing of EU borders towards a grey zone of "non-Europe" and the triangle of delicate relations between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus from which EU internal and external policies might suffer.

Finally, the identity issues are equally important and they are related to a number of diversities focusing on the religion. This gives a strong incentive to the dilemma of "European Culture or Europe of Cultures", that hardly can find an answer.

All the questions raised above are important points of the EU enlargement debate, but in the case of Turkey, the question of identity is always as important because it is related to a number of diversities that focus on the religious faith of this country. The decision for

Turkey's accession to the European Union is a sensitive test for the future of the Union, but the challenges are also real. However, expansion is not impossible if the integration factors do not value the play by the actors as zero.

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