



The Way Forward for Turkey and the EU

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A Strategic Dialogue on Foreign Policy

Heather Grabbe and Sinan Ülgen

Summary

Turkey's membership negotiations with the European Union (EU) have regrettably slowed to a crawl after five years. At least half of the 35 negotiating chapters, or subject areas, which need to be agreed on are blocked on the EU side owing to the problem of Cyprus and France's opposition to Ankara's membership. The only hope for progress now is for Turkey to implement the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement that calls on Turkey to lift the restrictions on Cypriot vessels from being admitted to its ports and airports. This would be welcome, but it's a long shot. Meanwhile, Turkey and the EU both face urgent foreign and security issues that cannot wait. As a result, they need a new, more effective channel for strategic dialogue to complement the accession process.

As longtime supporters of Turkey's bid to join the EU—both as analysts and policy actors—we oppose anything that could undermine Turkey's track toward EU accession. We propose a strategic dialogue at several levels to engage Turkey and the EU in resolving regional conflicts and problems of common concern as part of the preparations for membership. An effective dialogue on foreign, security, and defense issues would complement the accession process. It could even help to re-invigorate it by reminding all sides of their many mutual interests.

In practice, the EU and Turkey should adopt informal but regular talks in the form of four meetings per year, at the summit, ministerial, and working levels. The format would be "27-plus-one," with all of the 27 EU member states and Turkey participating, and intensified dialogue between EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton, and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. In addition, Turkey should meet the EU heads of state and government once a year to discuss major strategic questions.

Rather than focusing on EU-Turkey relations, the agenda should be strategic issues of mutual concern, particularly in the region surrounding Turkey and the current EU members. This initiative should be accompanied by concrete measures to facilitate Turkey's integration as a valued partner in the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, which guides European strategy.

Introduction

Turkey's negotiations to join the European Union (EU) have slowed considerably. Brussels and Ankara used to open four chapters¹ a year, but this year only one (on food safety, veterinary, and phytosanitary policy) has been opened, with the chapter on competition postponed until 2011.

Around half of the 35 negotiating chapters are frozen on the EU side, principally over the unresolved division of Cyprus and French President Nicolas Sarkozy's opposition to Turkish accession. Every chapter opening has to be agreed to unanimously by all 27 EU members, so blocking the chapters is easy. Not surprisingly, the pace of Turkey's own work to open more chapters has also slowed, and the country did not meet the benchmarks on time to open the chapter on competition as planned this month.

There is still hope for some kind of deal to allow progress on implementing the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement, which requires Turkey to admit Cypriot-flagged vessels to its ports and airports. Such a breakthrough would unblock many chapters, restoring much-needed momentum to the accession process and encouraging Turkey's transformation into a more European, open society. If Turkey could open Chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights, that would help to speed up contested internal reforms long demanded by the EU. Similarly, it would be in the EU's own interest to open Chapter 15 on energy to engage Turkey as a key partner for Europe's energy supply. But both are blocked by Cyprus.

If the latest efforts fail to achieve a breakthrough, the hold-ups to the negotiations should not prevent engagement in other key areas. Cooperation on foreign and security policy brings many benefits for both the EU and Turkey and is essential to help both manage the many problems in their mutual neighborhood. Joint work that keeps officials busy and politicians meeting frequently would also prevent the atmosphere from becoming more acrimonious if the negotiations remain stalled.

Improving relations will require a parallel track for Ankara and Brussels to discuss major regional security issues. A good basis is the relationship between EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Catherine Ashton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. They are already talking in an atmosphere of trust about sensitive issues in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. Now this dialogue should be widened to include the EU foreign ministers and senior officials, and deepened through regular exchanges.

Why Start a Strategic Dialogue?

Before the Lisbon Treaty went into effect this year, Turkish ministers discussed foreign policy issues during Troika meetings with Ashton's predecessor, Javier

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Solana, and the current and future presidencies. Previously, Turkish ministers met their EU counterparts at the intergovernmental conference to open accession negotiations every six months. But such opportunities are now rare.

Now that this system has been replaced with twice-yearly “ministerial political dialogues” between Ashton and Davutoglu, Lisbon has created a golden moment to open new channels to Turkey also for ministers, officials, and diplomats. Ashton is also chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, vice president of the European Commission, and head of a new External Action Service (EAS) that will represent the EU abroad and manage external relations in Brussels. While the new system is being built, the EU has an opportunity to rethink how it engages with Turkey on foreign policy issues, and create a new channel for dialogue at several levels.

The accession process should remain the center of the EU-Turkey relationship. Ideally, Turkey and the EU should talk about foreign policy issues in the context of the negotiating chapters on external relations and on foreign, security, and defense policy (Chapters 30 and 31, respectively). However, while these chapters are blocked because of unresolved problems with Cyprus and Greece, the EU and Turkey need a new, more effective way to discuss strategic questions.

The new channel should not undermine the potential to accelerate accession negotiations. To avoid Turkey skeptics in the EU using it as the basis for a “privileged partnership” that diverts Turkey from the accession track, an effective foreign policy dialogue should discuss only strategic issues, not bilateral ones. Such a channel could even help to reinvigorate the accession process by reminding the 27 EU countries and Turkey of their many shared interests.

This does not mean starting a “trialogue” of EU-Turkey-Russia summits.² Turkey and Russia have two quite different relationships with the EU. To hold summit meetings with both of them together would devalue Turkey’s status as a candidate for EU membership.

Moreover, Turkey’s strategic approach to foreign relations is more like the EU’s than Russia’s is. Turkey is more of a long-term foreign policy player than Russia, and Ankara is closer in its thinking to the EU, giving priority to maintaining a stable neighborhood that allows economic activity to flourish. Turkey is sometimes more concerned than the EU about preserving the status quo and generally less concerned about promoting democracy and human rights abroad. But Ankara’s overall approach is more familiar and agreeable to EU diplomats than Russia’s.

Turkey is also more than a “strategic partner,” the status the EU has accorded to Russia; conversely for Turkey, the EU is more than a foreign country with which it has diplomatic relations. The most important feature of the accession-based relationship for foreign policy is the sense of common destiny it gives to both sides.

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This sense of common destiny and strategic orientation toward EU membership made Turkey positively inclined to follow EU preferences in foreign policy in the years surrounding the start of negotiations in October 2005, including alignment with EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) positions.

But as the pace of accession negotiations has slowed, Turkey has moved into a more neutral position, assessing each case on its merits, and has disagreed with the EU more often, most notably on Iran. If the accession process stalls completely and the relationship sours further, the more nationalistic forces in Ankara will be tempted to turn Turkey against EU positions and interests.

Both the EU and Turkey have much to gain by working together on countries and issues such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, nuclear nonproliferation, or the Middle East peace process. Conversely, both will lose if they start trying to compete in the Middle East, where each has different channels of influence. The EU should make good use of Turkey's soft power through its long-established commercial, diplomatic, and cultural relationships throughout the region.

Meanwhile, Turkey would benefit from moving in the same direction as powerful EU companies and member states, which possess hard as well as soft power. The EU should also invite Turkey to provide input to the ongoing review of its European Neighborhood Policy, as Ankara has many insights on how best to use EU instruments in the region.

What's in it for the EU?

The debate about Turkey's accession prospects in the EU revolves around internal EU issues, particularly the role of Turks and other migrants who reside in Europe and existential questions about the future of the Union. This focus has led many EU politicians to lose sight of the value of working closely with a regional power that has more than 70 million inhabitants and an economy growing much more rapidly than that of any EU country.

Turkey is a serious foreign policy player with a huge presence in its surrounding region. It has 106 embassies and 70 consulates, in addition to cultural offices, with almost 1,000 diplomats. The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency channeled almost \$1.5 billion of Turkish aid to 98 countries in 2009. A major recipient of this aid was Afghanistan, where Turks provided medical treatment to 1 million Afghans; education to 70,000 boys and girls; and training to 13,000 Afghan soldiers and police, while leading the International Security Assistance Force's regional command in Kabul.

Turkey has recently pursued a more visible and vigorous regional engagement policy affecting many areas of shared concern with the EU. The objective of Turkey's diplomatic activism—particularly in the Middle East—is to contribute to the settlement of frozen conflicts, even if concrete results have been few.

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The growing portfolio of Turkey's mediation efforts in bilateral and regional disputes is another indicator of its regional influence. Ankara has led diplomatic efforts in and around Afghanistan and Pakistan, and between Bosnia and Serbia, Georgia and break-away Abkhazia, and Israel and Pakistan. Turkey's third-party involvement in such disputes has bolstered its image as a constructive regional player.

This visible transformation in the scope and ambition of Turkish foreign policy was made possible by growing economic power. Excluding 2009, the year of global crisis, the Turkish economy has grown at an annual average rate of 7.5 percent during the past seven years. As a result, Turkey has become the sixteenth-largest economy in the world, with a GDP fast approaching the \$1 trillion mark, and is much bigger than most EU economies. In the first half of 2010, Turkey scored the fastest growth rate among the OECD economies, at 11 percent. Total trade volume has reached \$243 billion, while inward direct investment reached a total of \$68.4 billion over the last four years.

Turkey's regional engagement is sometimes seen as a threat to the EU's influence, but it could also be a great opportunity if they work in tandem. Turkey's own success in being a majority Muslim country with openly contested elections, in having a vibrant and increasingly open economy, and in improving the cultural freedoms of minorities such as the Kurds are having a demonstration effect across the wider Middle East.

Deep engagement with such a country will itself further the EU's goals to create a more democratic, economically open, and better governed Middle East. By embedding Turkish foreign policy with EU structures and policies, Europeans could dynamize and enhance their own engagement in a region central to their interests.

Moreover, previous enlargements of the EU have shown the power of regular contacts between officials and politicians in changing attitudes, norms, and behavior. Even outside the accession process, engagement that is regular and substantive on urgent issues is likely to bring a common understanding among diplomats, politicians, and even lawmakers in many different parts of Turkey's elaborate foreign and security network. The EU has the opportunity to wed Turkey's ambition to become an important global actor with also becoming a constructive team player.

What's in it for Turkey?

Turkish policy makers tend to view foreign policy cooperation with the EU as a platform that essentially benefits Brussels. Ankara thinks its growing regional footprint and enhanced soft power already allow Turkey to undertake all of the diplomatic initiatives it wants. Many Turkish diplomats and politicians see EU foreign policy as ineffective and often ham-fisted in the Middle East, making

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them view cooperation as somewhat of a liability. They also point out to observers that if EU capitals had a genuine interest in such an endeavor, the chapter on foreign and security policy would have been opened.

This thinking fails to take into account the likely changes resulting from the Lisbon Treaty. This year, the EU has hit the pause button rather than the reset button with Turkey by spending so long establishing its new foreign policy structures. But in the medium term, the concentration of the powers of the EU institutions in Ashton's hands—with the new EAS supporting her—will turn the EU into a bigger and better foreign policy player. Therefore cooperation with Brussels will provide a much richer menu of options for Turkish diplomacy over time.

A structured foreign policy dialogue would help to restore the environment of mutual trust undermined by the accumulated frustrations of the accession negotiations. Such a foreign policy alliance can also have a transformative effect on the climate of negotiations by bringing Ankara closer to the diplomatic powers of Europe. A permanent collaborative structure would enable Turkey to gain a role in shaping European foreign policy in areas that really matter to Turkey, in particular in Turkey's own neighborhood. Moreover, Turkey's influence in its region will increase as it gains access to EU markets and policy making, which its neighbors lack.

Turkey's fuller engagement with the EU on foreign policy would also positively affect the transatlantic relationship. A number of contentious issues related to policies toward Iran, Israel, and Hamas have surfaced between Ankara and Washington as a result of Turkey's more active and assertive diplomacy in the Middle East. As a foreign policy actor deeply involved in the Middle East, the United States—even more than Europe—will have to adjust to the new Turkey. In many ways, the transformation of Turkish policy will alter the power relationship between Washington and Ankara. This adjustment will be easier for both sides if the EU remains engaged with Turkey as an instrumental partner in foreign policy. In particular, a stronger Turkey-EU dialogue on foreign policy will allay fears that Turkey is drifting away from the West.

The Strategic Dialogue in Practice

The purpose of the foreign dialogue is to address issues of common concern without disrupting the chances for renewed vigor in the accession process, preferably through four meetings a year, at the summit, ministerial, and working levels. All of the 27 EU member states and Turkey would participate, with discussion focusing on strategic issues of shared interest, particularly in the region surrounding Turkey and the current EU members.

Annual Summit. Once a year, European Council President Herman van Rompuy should chair a special summit on strategic issues in the wider neighborhood, with Turkey represented by both its prime minister and president. President

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Abdullah Gül is a major foreign policy asset, given his experience in international diplomacy through the Council of Europe and as a very successful Turkish foreign minister. His presence as an elder statesman would prove valuable and provide continuity to the discussion.

Ministerial. The Turkish and EU foreign ministers need discussions that are regular but relatively informal. If the dialogue is not institutionalized, it risks being disrupted by the ups and downs of the accession process and Turkish politics. But if such a dialogue is formalized, it risks being blocked by all of the factors that have blocked the accession process.

Ashton and Davutoglu already have an excellent relationship and talk regularly about Turkey's region and many international matters. By bringing in the EU foreign ministers for substantive but informal discussions as well, they can forge a common understanding of the choices confronting both regional powers.

For the 27 foreign ministers, the best format to do this is their informal meetings every six months, known as the "Gymnich." Turkey has been attending special sessions for candidate countries at the Gymnich since accession negotiations began five years ago. This participation should now be scaled up to a foreign policy dialogue between the Turkish foreign minister and his 27 counterparts, chaired by Ashton. The agenda should focus on key mutual interests such as Iraq and Syria, in a half-day or day-long session before the 27 ministers meet among themselves. As chair, Ashton would need to keep the agenda tightly focused on strategic issues and not let it be hijacked by problems in bilateral relations.

Ashton herself needs a more formal dialogue with the Turkish foreign minister. Before the Lisbon Treaty took effect, Turkey had twice-yearly "Troika" dialogues with the EU to discuss foreign policy issues; the three partners representing the EU included the foreign minister of the rotating presidency, Solana, and then-Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn. Now the Troika format is gone, so Ashton needs an intensified dialogue to replace it.

Working Level. The EAS will need to find a way to work with the political directors of the EU's foreign ministries, and Turkey could be involved in some of these new forms of cooperation. The Lisbon Treaty replaced the useful format of the 27 political directors' meeting prior to the Troika. Now this format could be used to prepare and underpin the political-level meetings of an annual summit and two ministerials a year.

Turkey recently proposed a regular dialogue with the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) ambassadors and informal policy planning talks. This suggestion makes sense, especially as the PSC will soon gain a permanent chair who could ensure that key regional issues are covered systematically, including areas where Turkey seeks greater involvement, such as the Balkans.

The EU-Turkey Association Council used to be an opportunity for working-level discussions, but is now nearly defunct because of the impasse in accession negotiations. The new channels would not replace it, but supplement the council and allow this format to resume when negotiations get going again.

KEY AREAS FOR STRATEGIC DIALOGUE		
COUNTRIES/REGIONS		ISSUES
Iran	Caucasus	Aid
Iraq	Balkans	Crisis management and Intervention
Afghanistan	Central Asia	Nuclear nonproliferation
Pakistan	Africa	Trafficking
Middle East		

Defense and security cooperation

The EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)³ represents another dimension of working-level engagement. It is particularly important given that Turkey has defense and security assets, which can help EU missions in dangerous parts of the world.

To build a strong and sustainable foreign policy dialogue, the EU and NATO will both need to improve security cooperation, which is hindered by the intractability of the Cyprus problem. Cyprus uses its EU membership to block Turkey, while Turkey uses its NATO membership to exclude Cyprus. In particular, Turkey’s exclusion of Cyprus from the strategic dialogue between NATO and the EU, based on the “agreed framework”—which covers all issues between the two relating to security, defense, and crisis management—hinders practical and political cooperation.

In return, Cyprus is blocking the conclusion of a security agreement between Turkey and the EU that would allow Turkey to be more comprehensively integrated into the CSDP. The lack of an EU-Turkey security agreement for the exchange of classified information can put lives at risk if soldiers from EU countries cannot share intelligence and information with their Turkish colleagues in conflict situations in real time.

Turkey and EU members have found practical solutions on the ground to lessen the risks in the many missions in which Turkey is involved, including in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, this situation is perverse and detrimental to the interests of both sides. It prevents the EU from taking advantage of the full range of Turkey’s capabilities and assets in CSDP missions. Turkey could substantially reinforce the EU’s military and civilian capacities of crisis management. It already outperforms many EU member states in its personnel and financial contributions.

Turkey is also the largest non-EU contributor to CSDP missions and operations. Ankara provided the second-largest contingent of 255 military personnel to EUFOR Althea, the EU's force in Bosnia, and 48 law enforcement officers to the police mission in Bosnia. It has also contributed 55 law enforcement personnel to EULEX in Kosovo and indicated a willingness to increase the number to 150 personnel in 2011.

Turkey has also participated in three past CSDP operations (CONCORDIA, the military operation in Macedonia; PROXIMA, the police mission in Macedonia; and EUPOL, the police mission in Kinshasa), while providing strategic airlift capability for the military peacekeeping operation EUFOR in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A mutually satisfactory settlement concerning Turkey's overall involvement in CSDP structures would lead to much more meaningful cooperation between Turkey and the EU and maximize the effectiveness of CSDP missions on the ground.

At the same time, Turkey is excluded from participating in European defense industry collaboration under the aegis of the European Defence Agency, even though it has a more significant defense budget than most EU member states. EU member states are unable to carry out expensive developmental projects—such as the unmanned air vehicle or military communications infrastructure—at lesser cost as defense budgets are cut because of Turkey's exclusion. Yet Turkey shares with other CFSP actors the same threat perceptions, priorities, and means to address challenges.

Additionally, the lack of a mutually satisfactory solution to Turkey-EU collaboration on security policy is poisoning the NATO-EU relationship. The lack of a politically negotiated framework makes it nearly impossible for the EU and NATO to coordinate parallel operations, for example, in fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia, or in Afghanistan or Kosovo. Turkey is unwilling to lift its side of the mutual blockade with Cyprus if there is any risk of recognizing Cyprus as a state.

The solution to the current EU-Turkey conundrum needs to consider the two sources of difficulty: institutional rigidities in the CSDP framework and the unsettled problem of Cyprus. Many of the current problems result from Turkey being treated like any other non-EU country. Despite being an EU candidate country for five years and a NATO member for more than fifty years, Ankara is no more integrated into CSDP than Moscow or Mexico City.

For instance, Turkish diplomats complain that even the agreed-upon consultation mechanisms are not being used. They point out that Turkey's request for immediate consultations with the EU before the EU mission in Georgia was rejected. Turkey was also kept away from the civilian CSDP mission in Iraq. Turkey's status needs to move from that of a third country into a genuine partner in security policy.

The lack of a mutually satisfactory solution to the Turkey-EU collaboration in the area of security policy is poisoning the NATO-EU relationship.

Practical arrangements are also needed to embrace Turkey. The following steps would greatly enhance the framework and climate of cooperation between the two partners:

- Involve Ankara in the planning, implementation, and force-generation process for EU-led missions, rather than asking Turkey for a contribution if and when needed after the political and technical planning is already completed;
- Ensure comprehensive and intensive participation of Turkey in peacetime CSDP consultations through permanent and continuing consultations covering the full range of security, defense, and crisis-management issues, in particular at the level of the Political and Security Council and the EU Military Committee;
- Consult Ankara when the EU envisages action near Turkey or in areas of strategic interest to Turkey;
- End the distinction between participation in military and civilian operations and enable increased bilateral contact on crisis management;
- Guarantee a Turkish presence in EU headquarters for operations to which Turkey contributes;
- Enable Ankara to participate in the work of the European Defence Agency;
- Conclude a Security Agreement between Turkey and the EU to allow intelligence-sharing and secure communications;
- Establish a Committee of Contributors at the operational level for any EU-led mission to make decisions on the day-to-day management as well as the strategic direction of the mission; consult on possible adjustments to operational design and objectives as well as on planning the end of the mission and the withdrawal of forces; and provide its assessment of the lessons learned from the mission.

These steps would greatly facilitate Turkey's integration as a valued partner into the CSDP framework. A further constructive step to break the NATO-EU stalemate would be to launch a "NATO-EU Consultation Group," under NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Ashton's leadership, to deliberate on all topics relevant to the strategic partnership between the two organizations. Informal EU-NATO policy dialogues would allow initiatives to develop joint capabilities and increase other forms of collaboration.

Conclusions

The EU-Turkey relationship has faced inclement political weather over the past few years. Both sides have tried to make headway despite the frequent political

storms, but progress has slowed. Now the accession process may have to drop anchor and ride out the storm if there is no breakthrough on the Cyprus issue.

Time is on the side of Turkey's accession to the EU. Over the next years, the benefits of integration will become more evident to EU capitals and to Ankara as the Turkish economy grows, EU labor market needs increase, and problems in the Middle East intensify. Obstacles can fall, too. The 2012 presidential election in France could reduce Paris's hostility, while Germany's debate over multiculturalism may lead to a renewed consensus that makes Turkey look like more of an opportunity than a threat. Even the gloom surrounding the Cyprus talks could lift.

While awaiting a clearer sky for the negotiations, the EU and Turkey both have much to gain by intensifying their foreign policy engagement. Turkey's political and economic transformation over the past decade has helped Ankara to become a more influential regional player. Turkey's growing outreach in the Middle East and, to a lesser degree, in the Balkans, its emergence as a responsible aid provider and an active participant in multilateral diplomacy, and the number and scope of its mediation efforts in the Middle East and beyond, all indicate Turkey's potential for increased influence and recognition.

Turkey's regional engagement is an opportunity for the EU. The paradox is that just as Turkey is starting to acquire the capacity to become a valuable partner for EU foreign policy, the distance between Ankara and Brussels has increased. The challenge will be for both sides to bypass problematic areas in accession negotiations and start an institutionalized foreign policy dialogue. The changes brought to the EU's external policy machinery by adopting the Lisbon Treaty can underpin a renewed engagement with Turkey. The new diplomatic service under Ashton's guidance should also allow the EU to engage with Turkey at a working level that parallels the accession process.

The EU should not only see Turkey as a candidate for accession but view Ankara as a significant potential asset for effective multilateralism. At the same time, Turkey should think beyond its accumulated frustrations with negotiations and seize the opportunity to couple its diplomatic activism with a strategic alliance with the EU. Over time, this engagement will strengthen the accession process by forging bonds at the working and political levels, and foster a common understanding of and approach to the many problems that both Turkey and the EU want to solve.

Notes

- 1 The subjects for negotiation are divided up into 35 "chapters."
- 2 As proposed by the European Council on Foreign Relations in "The spectre of a multipolar Europe," ECFR, October 2010.
- 3 CSDP was formerly known as ESDP—European Security and Defence Policy.

Time is on the side of Turkey's accession to the EU.

HEATHER GRABBE is director of the Open Society Institute-Brussels, and was previously a senior adviser responsible for Turkey to the EU's Enlargement Commissioner.

SINAN ÜLGEN is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe and chairman of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), an independent think tank in Istanbul. He was previously a Turkish diplomat.

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