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Executive Summary

The complexity of European views on Turkey is often neglected, both in Europe and in the United States. European countries are currently divided on Turkey's prospective membership in the European Union (EU), but along multiple lines. This paper discusses the particular perspectives of the three Southern European States, Spain, Italy and Greece, placing them in the larger context of European and Western views of Turkey. Southern European countries' support of Turkey's EU membership is often explained by parochial national or regional interests. The paper shows, however, that some of the arguments used by these countries in favor of closer relations with Turkey are also inspired by a more enlightened definition of national priorities that firmly links Turkey's integration with the EU to broader European interests.

From a Southern European perspective, three particular visions of the European Union highlight the value of EU enlargement to Turkey: the EU as the embodiment of European democracy, the EU as an international power with growing stakes in developments around and beyond its borders; and the EU as an ongoing peace and security project. In fact, the Spanish, Italian and Greek positions on Turkey and the future of the EU all share the view that security concerns and strategic interests demand the continuation of EU enlargement policy. The future strength of the EU depends on its ability to anchor Turkey's economic development to the consolidation of Turkish democracy through EU membership. If the European Union succeeds in steering Turkey's rise as a regional actor in a direction that creates more stability and peace around Europe's borders, then this will give the EU greater influence in its broader neighborhood.

The paper also considers the larger picture, noting that the future of Turkish-EU relations has arguably never been as uncertain as it is today. Enlargement fatigue has been exacerbated by the most recent financial crisis. France and Germany are currently opposed to Turkey's EU membership and Turkey-skeptics seem to be increasing across Europe. Growing skepticism in EU countries is matched by greater cynicism about the European Union among Turkish elites, who seem to be focused elsewhere. The debate on Turkey's alleged drift from the West has intensified in recent months—a consequence of developments that have been followed with great apprehension in Washington and European capitals—such as Turkish-Israeli fraying relations and Turkey's de-alignment on UN-mandated sanctions against Iran. According to a growing number of observers, Ankara's recent foreign policy moves would show that the much publicized 'zero-problems-with-neighbors' policy is applied only selectively by the Turkish government, which seems to neglect that if Iran is an important neighbor, so are the EU and Israel.

In this context, the paper underscores the fact that EU enlargement to Turkey remains a prospect, not a development that will take place in the short term. In order to sustain this prospect, EU member states will have to decide whether the costs and uncertainties of Turkey's integration into the European Union outbalance the risks of its exclusion and isolation. From the Italian, Spanish and Greek perspectives, losing Turkey presents far greater risks for the European Union and Europe than integrating it.

The paper concludes with an assessment of U.S. influence on Turkish-EU relations, highlighting both the limits and potential of Washington's traditional advocacy of Turkey's EU membership. It argues that closer coordination between the United States and the Italian, Spanish and Greek governments could prove very valuable. This diplomatic effort would complement, not replace, U.S. cooperation with other traditional supporters of Turkey's EU membership such as the United Kingdom. Moreover, efforts would not be aimed at isolating Germany or France within the EU, but at addressing these countries' concerns with a more comprehensive and satisfying set of arguments that would highlight the intimate connections between Turkey's EU perspective, European democracy and security, and the future of the EU as an international player.

In this context, the United States should consider incorporating some Southern European arguments more prominently in its own discourse about Turkey. The traditional U.S. strategic argument about Turkey can be retained, but emphasis should be put not so much on roles recently questioned by Western commentators—Turkey as a loyal ally of the West, the spearhead of Western interests and values in the Middle East—but on Turkey as an inevitable part of Europe's future. Further focus should be placed on EU enlargement as the instrument that will ensure Turkey's rise translates into increased stability and power for Europe and the West rather than creating new challenges and competition around Europe's borders.

A Multidimensional European Geography

The geography of European Union views on Turkey is varied and evolving, but attention has generally focused on the divide between the United Kingdom and other traditionally pro-enlargement EU countries in Northern Europe, and France, Germany and other continental EU members such as Austria.[1] The former group, with the external support of the United States and most recently of some of the European Union's new members such as the Czech Republic and Poland, has advocated Turkey's EU membership on the grounds that Turkey has been a key strategic ally of the West since the Cold War era and has become an ever more valuable economic partner of the European Union. These countries have also often stressed that, as a predominantly Muslim society with secular institutions and a capitalist system, Turkey represents a model for the larger Muslim world and can act as a bridge between the West and the East.

On the other side of the spectrum are some of the EU's original and leading members, such as France and Germany. Although the position of these countries has often significantly changed over time (French President Jacques Chirac actually deserves credit for the breakthrough decision in 2004 to open EU negotiations for Turkish membership), in recent years French-German resistance has become a major obstacle to Turkey's EU ambitions.[2] Germany has made no secret of its mixed experience with Turkish immigrant communities on German soil, which are frequently accused of not having made a serious effort to integrate fully into German society.[3] Berlin has also been highly critical of Ankara's uneven record of domestic reform and selective approach to fulfilling some of the legal obligations it has undertaken with the EU during the accession process.

France, for its part, has unilaterally blocked five of the thirty-five chapters of the EU negotiations with Turkey—in addition to the eight that have been frozen by the European Union itself as a result of Turkey's unfulfilled commitments on Cyprus.[4] These include chapters covering critical subjects such as economic and monetary union. The French veto is a product of the country's current leadership, which simply does not want Turkey to become a full member of the European Union. President Nicolas Sarkozy has openly questioned whether Turkey belongs to Europe from both a geographical and a cultural perspective.[5] His questions reflect the concerns of the French public, which—like the larger European public—has grown increasingly Islamophobic in recent years. Recent polls show that the majority of Europeans now oppose further enlargement of the European Union, and that Turkey receives particularly low levels of support in France, and across Europe more broadly, mainly because it is perceived as religiously different.[6]

Although cultural and religious factors should not be underestimated, it is doubtful that these fully explain the resistance in Paris and other European capitals to Turkey's integration in the European Union. Among experts and diplomatic circles it is well-known that opposition to Turkey is also tied to concerns that the inclusion of a nation with a population exceeding seventy million people, a young and rising economy, and a growing set of geopolitical ambitions of its own, would dramatically alter the EU's already complex balances—most probably creating new institutional

problems, and undermining the already imperfect coherence of interests among EU states, as well as leading to a loss of status for some of the European Union's original members.

The fact that these considerations have considerable weight inside Europe is highlighted by the counter-proposal for a 'privileged partnership' as an alternative to Turkey's full membership that France has made during internal EU debates on Turkish integration. This proposal is indicative of the duality in the approach of France and other EU member states toward Turkey. French President Sarkozy, for example, has consistently made it clear that he is not against EU *cooperation* with Turkey. In fact, at various junctures, President Sarkozy has actively sought some form of coordination between French and Turkish diplomatic initiatives on major strategic issues such as the dialogue with Syria and the Arab-Israeli peace process. Sarkozy has also sponsored the idea of an EU 'Union for the Mediterranean' in which Turkey could play a prominent role.[7] On the other hand, however, Paris has also made it very clear that Brussels's economic integration and strategic cooperation with Ankara should only continue if it takes place *outside* EU institutions. From the French point of view, EU policy convergences with Turkey should be verified and implemented on a case by case basis, but Ankara should not be given a say (or perhaps even a veto) on all EU foreign policy initiatives. Through the 'privileged partnership' option, France also seeks to ensure that its role as one of Europe's leaders will not be challenged by Turkey, which given its size and strategic assets would immediately compete for a place in the higher ranks of the European Union if it became a new member.[8]

While the divide sketched out above is the most prominent element of the geography of European views on Turkey, other dimensions are important too. A position that is seldom fully appreciated, especially outside the European Union, is that of Southern European countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece. Although Madrid, Rome and Athens share many of the views of other pro-enlargement capitals and some of the concerns of Paris and Berlin, they have developed their own sets of arguments in support of Turkey's EU bid. Some of their motivations in favor of Turkish EU accession are narrowly national and parochial, and are focused not only on the strong bilateral economic ties that link these Mediterranean countries to Turkey but also the expectation that further gains will be reaped from Turkey's full integration in the European economic union. In other cases, however, Spain, Italy and Greece have propounded arguments and notions that, based on their national experiences or priorities, have firmly linked Turkey's EU prospects to the pursuit of a broader European interest. In doing so, they have made a case for Turkey that also represents their own firm stance on enhancing European democracy and security, and strengthening the European Union's position as an international actor.

Calculus, Opportunism and Enlightened National Interest

It is easy to find elements of political calculus and opportunism in the Southern European EU members' positions on Turkey's EU membership. Both Spanish and Italian diplomats openly make the argument that enlargement to Turkey would compensate for the 2004-2007 enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, by helping to shift the axis of the European Union towards the south.[9] The common Mediterranean identity of Turkey and Southern European countries is stressed as a critical factor in explaining a sense of solidarity that is also based on the affinity of culture and traditions. This element—which is deliberately underplayed by France and other European countries—is shared also to a large extent by Greece, despite the long history of competition and enmity that has characterized Greek-Turkish relations. The Greeks do not seem to have the same concerns as other Europeans about Turkey's religious revival, and tend to see current Turkish ruling elites as more traditionalist and conservative than Islamist—a characteristic that is accepted and sometimes even praised as consistent with Mediterranean culture.[10]

The problem with the Southern European argument about a common 'Mediterranean-ness' is not based in competition over ownership of the concept among Spain, Italy and Greece, but in the fact that Turkey itself finds this idea reductive. Under the influence of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, a scholar of geopolitics and civilizations, Turkey has placed great emphasis on its multiple identities and affiliations. Turkey currently presents itself as a country whose interests cannot be confined to any particular region because it lies on the crossroads, or at the *center*, of several intersecting geopolitical regions of critical strategic relevance such as the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.[11] Even before Foreign Minister Davutoglu conceived of the idea of 'Afro-Eurasia,' to identify the macro-region of Turkey's geopolitical ambitions, Turkish elites' mental geography was influenced by the Ottoman legacy—the Ottoman Empire being for centuries a multiethnic and transcontinental empire.[12] This legacy was never completely neglected in the modern period, even though the importance of Turkey's ties with the cultures and peoples lying to its south and east was deliberately downplayed after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1924, when Turkey focused its attention more narrowly on building a new Turkish state.

A second parochial element in the Spanish, Italian and Greek support of Turkey's EU membership is economic, focusing on business and energy security considerations. Turkish-Spanish economic ties have strengthened considerably in recent years, particularly through bilateral trade. Italy has been one of Turkey's main trade partners in Europe for decades (it ranked third until the recent economic crisis).[13] Almost eight hundred Italian companies invest or directly operate in the Turkish economy, including Italy's automobile colossus FIAT (which has run a joint venture with the powerful Turkish Koc Group since 1968). Italy's leading energy firm, ENI, has worked closely with both Moscow and Ankara on opening new routes for Russian gas exports to Europe. In October 2009, Italy, Turkey and Russia signed a joint declaration on the construction of the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline, connecting Turkey's Black Sea coast to the Mediterranean and involving the cooperation of firms from all three countries.[14] The banking sector is also among

Italy's main stakeholders in Turkey. Unicredit, an Italy-based pan-European firm has invested extensively in Turkey, as well as in other recent or future EU accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Banking companies are among the strongest advocates of Turkey's full integration into the EU, supporting the upgrading of the current Customs Union agreement, which entered into force in 1995, to a full economic union. Leaving aside the issue of the Euro—which would be too premature to begin debating, especially at the current juncture—Turkey's entry into the European economic union would, in itself, have a considerable impact on the political and sovereign risk estimates that are of paramount importance for the type of structural investments made by banking firms operating in foreign markets.

These views are also shared by Greek business elites, who, despite political tensions that erupt periodically between the two countries, have looked to Turkey as a vast and lucrative market for both trade and investment.[15] Several mergers and joint ventures have taken place in recent years between Greek and Turkish banks, and FDI figures indicate a steady integration of the two economies until the contraction of Turkish demand following the economic downturn and Greece's most recent financial crisis.

These kinds of economic considerations can be easily dismissed as parochial and opportunistic, and on their own they do not fully explain the various European positions on Turkey's EU membership. France, for instance, has an extremely positive economic relationship with Turkey, and French officials proudly advertise the fact that French firms have created thousands of jobs for Turks in the Turkish economy.[16] Germany is Turkey's main trade partner in the EU, with a trade volume of over USD 3.2 billion in 2009.[17] However, Germany's views on Turkey seem to be influenced to a larger extent by the historical presence of the large Turkish immigrant communities in Germany.

The lack of perfect causality between economic interests and attitudes towards Turkey's prospective EU membership can also be appreciated in the reverse cases. Southern European economies are tied to Turkey's economy through relationships of compatibility as well as competition. This is particularly true when it comes to the agricultural sector. The concerns here are of at least two kinds. Production of traditional Southern European agricultural commodities, such as olive oil and cheese, could be seriously affected by Turkey's full integration into the European common market (the 1995 Customs Union notably does not include agricultural products). More broadly, the EU common agricultural policy—which until recently accounted for roughly half of the common EU budget—would have to be significantly reformulated after Turkey's entry, with what would seem to be negative consequences for the current main beneficiaries, including Spain, Italy and Greece. The same reasoning could be applied to the EU's regional policy, which has been used extensively to support some of the least developed areas of these three countries.

As important as they certainly are, particularistic motivations are not the only drivers of Southern European positions and need not conflict with broader, less parochial considerations. In fact, it is possible to highlight elements of the Spanish, Italian, and Greek positions on Turkey where the particular calculus has ultimately inspired an enlightened definition of national interest—arguments on Turkey that highlight a broader European interest and firmly link the future of Turkey to a particular vision of Europe.

The following is an attempt to sketch out this vision by focusing on three key concepts: the EU as the embodiment of European democracy, the EU as an international power with growing stakes and ambitions in its neighborhood, and the EU as an ongoing peace and security project. Each of these concepts is linked to one of the Southern European countries in particular, but they are in fact jointly supported, although with varying emphasis, by Spain, Italy, and Greece and other EU members. Common to these positions is the view that security concerns and strategic interests reinforce the need for greater EU commitment to enlargement to Turkey.

Spain's View: The European Union as the Embodiment of European Democracy

Starting with Spain, EU enlargement to Turkey was endorsed during the premiership of Jose Maria Aznar.[18] At this juncture, Aznar's professed 'Atlanticism' seemed to dovetail nicely with strong support for Turkey (a NATO member since 1952) in the European Union. Prominent figures in Aznar's party, the conservative People's Party, also stressed other considerations in favor of Turkish accession, such as Turkey's potential role as a 'bridge' between the West and the East and, with even greater emphasis, the need for current EU members not to discriminate against countries at different levels of political development.

These last two arguments resonated well with the Spanish Socialists who took over the government in 2004, even though their platform rejected the rigid Atlanticist orientation of the Aznar government. Instead of viewing Turkey through the prism of the American 'Trojan horse' in Europe (the Turkish parliament's March 2003 denial of Turkish territory as a military base for Operation Iraqi Freedom most probably helped in this regard), the new Spanish government of Jose Louis Rodriguez Zapatero insisted—even more than Spanish conservatives—on the application of the 'non-discrimination issue.' Spain's status as a relatively recent member of the European Union as well as a young democracy—it was admitted in 1986, only eleven years after the fall of the Franco regime—seemed to make Spain a natural ally for Turkey in Europe and a stronger supporter of Turkey's twin modernization and democratization processes.

Proving that there was more to Spanish support than merely bilateral interests, moreover, in 2005 Zapatero and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan co-sponsored the 'Alliance of Civilizations,' an ambitious initiative within the framework of the United Nations to reinvigorate a dialogue among countries from different continents of the world, with the goal of eradicating prejudice and preventing the spread of religious and ethnic fanaticism.[19] Both countries expected national returns from this grandiose project. This convergence of bilateral Spanish and Turkish interests nonetheless launched a multilateral initiative providing the international community at large with an important forum for intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Since then support in Spain for Turkey's EU membership has generally remained strong and widespread but there has been a clear change in the attitude of Spanish conservatives who seem to have become more pessimistic about the future of Europe and, at the same time, more cautious about EU enlargement. Several Spanish opposition members, for instance, have adhered to the view that in an increasingly globalizing world European civilization would be 'under threat' and European nations should respond to the challenge by reviving, among other things, their common Christian bond. In response to Turkey's more visible religious outlook and more independent foreign policy course, former Prime Minister Aznar himself has joined the camp of Turkey-skeptics, declaring that the European Union is simply not ready for such a controversial new member.[20]

As Atlanticism has become less fashionable in Spain and as Turkey's image has allegedly become 'more Islamic,' non-discrimination and democracy have maintained broad support among Spanish leaders

and the public as the two most powerful arguments in favor of Turkey's EU accession. For Spain, the European Union has offered and must continue to offer an anchor to countries in the process of becoming more modern and more democratic. This is seen both as a 'duty' for Europe and as an asset that confirms the European Union's relevance—by retaining the power to influence political and societal developments taking place outside the EU through the EU enlargement process.

Italy's View: The European Union as an International Power

The argument about Turkey as a 'bridge' between civilizations and cultures of the West and the East enjoys broad support in Italy, but Italian elites have presented Turkey's bridging role as equally important from an economic and strategic point of view.[21] Italian governments of different political orientations have all emphasized the role Turkey can play as an 'energy hub' connecting mainland Europe to much needed energy sources in Central Asia and the Caspian basin.

Italy, arguably, has also been more emphatic than almost any other European country about Turkey's critical addition to Europe's strategic assets to the South and East as the European Union aims to increase its influence in neighboring regions. Ankara's growing activism in the Middle East, which has caused concern in various European capitals as well as in Washington, has been followed more often with attention and interest rather than apprehension by Italian diplomats. They have seen not just the risks of a more independent, or more 'Islamic,' Turkish foreign policy, but also the opportunities and the added value of Turkey's multiple connections—which no other EU country can boast—to countries in the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East that are central to EU interests. Turkey's broad alignment with EU common foreign and security policy (CFSP) statements and declarations (99 out of a total 128 in the last reporting period), combined with a flurry of Turkish diplomatic activity that has hardly any parallel among other EU countries, has led some in Italy to argue that Turkey is in fact implementing the European Union's own neighborhood policy, perhaps even with greater alacrity and effectiveness than the EU itself.[22] Italy has also emphasized the already-proven potential of the EU-Turkish and Western-Turkish relationships on issues such as the stabilization of Afghanistan and Iraq and the maintenance of peace in Lebanon.[23]

There are, to be sure, also concerns in Italy about Turkey. Rome, like other Western capitals, views Ankara's soft stance on Iran and its fraying relationship with Israel with genuine preoccupation.[24] Although Italy favors a policy of engagement with Iran, Rome has seemed much more willing than Ankara to align itself with the new U.S. position – applying tougher sanctions should the Iranian regime keep refusing to cooperate on nuclear issues. There is, in fact, some fear among Italian diplomats that Ankara's foreign policy course might show increasing signs of independence from the West's, as Turkish elites grow more self-confident in their country's economic and geopolitical potential.[25]

Italian political elites seem to have come to the conclusion, however, that a 'no' to Turkey from the European Union would only reinforce this trend, whereas EU membership would limit the risk and actually represent a foreign policy opportunity for the European Union. In a speech at Ankara University in 2009, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano went so far as to argue that the European Union needs Turkey, if the goal shared by various generations of European leaders to establish a full-fledged 'European power' is to be reached—especially after the EU's most recent Eastern enlargement has made the Union bigger without making it any stronger.[26]

The Italian view that the entry of Central and Eastern European countries has weakened the European Union strategically is not completely justified (would the alternative of excluding these states have made the EU stronger?) and seems rooted in Italy's own frustrations about the comparatively less-developed Mediterranean and Southern dimensions of the European project. However, Italy's point about Turkey being a potential member of a new 'directorate' of nations committed to enhancing Europe's international profile—rather than a second-rank state, let alone a pariah—is a bold update of the 'Concert of Europe' of the 19th century. It seems inspired by Rome's conclusion that the European Union can only remain relevant in the 21st century if it is able to exert influence over dynamics outside Europe—specifically in the area stretching from the Middle East to Asia, where Turkey has demonstrated that it has some very valuable cards to play.

Greece's View: The EU as Collective Security Policy

Greece also views Turkey from a strategic perspective, but in this case internal and national security considerations, rather than foreign policy, underpin the Greek position. Greek-Turkish rivalry in the Aegean is a recent memory and elements of competition between the two countries persist.[27] Several issues, including the final status of the Turkish minority in Northern Cyprus are far from settled, and Greece has been criticized by Turkey for not doing enough to broker a deal between Turkish and Greek Cypriots.[28] Greek public opinion, moreover, still seems wary of Turkey's intentions and aims. What has changed dramatically, however, is the way Greece looks at the issue of 'checking' Turkey in its strategic competition for influence.

Traditionally, Greece adopted the posture of playing other international actors against Ankara and took a confrontational foreign policy stance against Turkey. Since the late 1990s, however, Athens has shifted to what could be defined as a 'neutralization through integration' strategy.[29] On the eve of the 1999 European Union Helsinki Summit granting Turkey EU candidate status, Greek elites reached the conclusion that Turkey's membership in the European Union offered the best guarantee for Greek security as EU members collectively could provide a stronger barrier to Turkish nationalism than Greece alone. Moreover, the developing relationship with the European Union would push Turkish foreign policy in the direction of cooperation, rather than confrontation, with its European neighbors. The Greeks also concluded that through EU-driven reforms, Turkey's domestic political development would be firmly anchored to European democracy. In short, Greece would be reassured as Turkey became more 'Europeanized.'[30]

There was certainly an element of opportunism and shrewdness in the sudden turnabout of the Greek government, then led by the socialist Kostas Simitis. Indeed, Greece's new stance on Turkey's EU membership helped to ensure the swift entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU a few years later. Cyprus's controversial EU membership was approved in 2004, the same year the European Council approved opening accession negotiations with Turkey. Cyprus's EU membership has since, however, become one of the most formidable obstacles to European Union enlargement to Turkey. The Republic of Cyprus's EU membership effectively ruled out the European Union as a possible mediator in the Cyprus question. Greek Cypriots, for their part, have sabotaged recent EU and international attempts to find a viable solution and hampered further progress in Turkish-EU cooperation—for instance by vetoing Turkey's participation in the European Defense Agency (EDA).

Despite these issues, where Greece could and should be called to do more, Greek-Turkish rapprochement remains a fact. It represents a development that was simply unthinkable in previous decades and would have hardly been possible without the European Union. The main Greek political parties now support closer relations between Turkey and the EU, seeing the European Union as reinforcing developing bilateral relations between Greece and Turkey. The most recent Greek financial crisis has not changed this orientation. On the contrary, Turkish elites have also committed to easing Greece's financial woes through

the mutual reduction of defense budgets and to supporting Greece's recovery through closer economic cooperation, especially in the fields of energy and transportation—a stance that has been appreciated in Athens as further confirming Ankara's shift from confrontation to cooperation and Turkey's value as a future full member of the European economic union.[31]

The case of Greece once again highlights broader facts about the potential and role of the European Union. As with France and Germany after World War II, European integration appeals to political leaders from former enemy or rival countries, and is seen as a viable instrument to overcome enmities in a mutually advantageous and peaceful way. If carefully planned and managed, EU enlargement can function as an effective collective security policy. Rather than importing instability into the European Union, it creates incentives for countries on its borders to rule out resorting to conflict. Competition, if it persists, is constrained and disciplined by the new EU institutional setting. Indeed, the European Union was conceived by its earliest proponents above all as a 'peace project,' a mechanism to contain nationalistic competition through the surrender of degrees of state sovereignty to common European institutions.

The Larger Picture

The existence of powerful arguments coming from Southern European countries in favor of EU enlargement to Turkey does not, in itself, suggest that they have traction in the wider European context. As already pointed out, enlargement fatigue has been exacerbated by Europe's recent negative economic projections. Greece is now absorbed by its daunting financial challenges, and Italy and Spain must also cope with severe economic problems. Moreover, the economic turmoil of the past two years has exposed the weakness of several new EU member states, adding to a long series of other considerations that make both European elites and publics very doubtful about the prospect of new members strengthening the European Union in any meaningful way.[32]

Turkish-EU relations have suffered, arguably to a larger extent than other relationships between the EU and candidate countries, from this change of context. Even UK Conservatives—who have always viewed enlargement as a means of diluting the EU project and preventing the rise of a European super-state—are now cooler on the issue of Turkey. In the May 2010 electoral campaign, the Conservative Party was careful not to give enlargement and related issues any prominence when discussing Great Britain's place in Europe and its role in the European Union. Similarly, Germany's new coalition government, which many initially thought would be able to adopt a more open-minded attitude towards Turkey, seems instead to have assumed an even more cautious view. German liberals in the coalition, represented by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, appear to have grown more skeptical about the prospects of EU enlargement, at least until Europe overcomes its internal crisis.[33]

Turkey's EU membership, however, is not an issue for today. Nor is it, strictly speaking, an issue for tomorrow. It is a prospect kept open by the European Union's institutions and bureaucracy. Given current widespread skepticism on the European side and frustration, or even signs of detachment, on the Turkish side, the Turkish-EU relationship will now have to be reconsidered by assessing its value to the vision of Turkey's and Europe's futures, rather than by considering the presently unfavorable conditions for Turkey's accession or past commitments by the European Union. It is exactly in this context that the positions of Southern European countries on Turkey may become most relevant.

Spanish, Italian and Greek pro-enlargement arguments highlight issues that would seem central to the future of Turkey and Europe as a whole. At their core is the vision of Europe as a combined democracy project and security instrument, and the European Union as a community of nations centered not only on internal solidarity but on the institution's relevance and power on the international stage. These first two views touch on the inherent defining elements of the vision of Europe as a union of nations as the European Union began to take shape after World War II. The vision of Europe as an international power in its own right is one shared by virtually all European leaders, embodying an aspiration that has become even stronger since the end of the Cold War. This aspiration may perhaps have been dented by the recent financial crisis but it has certainly not been extinguished.

Differences persist among EU member states about how to pursue these goals. Some of Europe's largest

countries seem inclined to believe that the European Union's recovery from present difficulties and reestablishment as an international actor can only be achieved in the present configuration—or perhaps by creating even narrower coalitions of willing countries within the EU. They fear that further enlargement would only render the European Union less coherent, making it extremely difficult to create the internal solidarity necessary to support a big vision. This currently seems to be the position of France and Germany. However, views held by these two countries often present, not a big vision *for* Europe, but what appears more like a less inspiring set of attempts to regain some political autonomy *from* the European Union.

If the question about Turkey is really whether it is a political asset or a liability for Europe and the EU, then the debate within the European Union should concentrate on this question, rather than perpetually being dominated by the controversial issue of the day or poisoned by the pervading influence of biases and preconceptions about culture and religion. Focusing anew and afresh on Turkey's potential contribution to the European project would not only force EU member countries to reflect on their real interests but would also send a clear message to Ankara.

Observers have rightly noted the declining support among Turks for EU membership. At the level of the Turkish public, this can be explained partly as a resentful response to European doubts and criticism. At the level of Turkish elites, however, there seems to be more going on.[34] The rhetoric, as well as some of the initiatives of the current Justice and Development Party (AKP)-led Turkish government, increasingly indicates not an 'Islamist drift'—as is often misleadingly concluded in Europe and in the United States—but undoubtedly the emergence of a more independent course for Turkey.[35] The reappearance of authoritarian tendencies domestically seems to be matched by the revival of Turkish nationalism.[36] While nobody in Europe is opposed to the Turkish government's 'zero problems with neighbors' policy, to many the implementation of this policy looks increasingly questionable.[37]

Turkey has indeed made great progress in its relations with Kurds in Northern Iraq and has often assumed the role of 'stabilizer' in neighboring regions, as the European Union had hoped.[38] However, on issues critical to EU membership, such as normalization of relations with Armenia and progress on the Cyprus question, results have not matched expectations. Turkey's soft stance on Iran—including the most recent signing of a separate deal in conjunction with Brazil on nuclear fuel and opposition to new UN-mandated sanctions—is seen by some in the West as signs of a larger de-alignment, or as the emergence of a new axis bringing Turkey together with emerging revisionist powers such as Iran and Syria, some of America's traditional rivals in the Middle East.[39] The most recent crisis between Turkey and Israel over the Gaza embargo has only reinforced this view.[40]

European and Western concerns about these developments, while often inflated by the media, are legitimate and in some cases real. The question, however, is whether the concerns are best addressed by isolating Turkey or by influencing its course, including through the process of EU enlargement. The combined arguments of Spain, Italy, and Greece implicitly or explicitly mean three things for Turkey.

The first is that the Turkish people will have only their leaders to blame if EU membership fails because Turkish elites decide to dissociate Turkey's EU ambitions from democratization and Turkey's development from reform. Using the EU membership issue as a tool in the internal struggle between Turkish secularist and religious elites may work for the AKP-led government in the short term, but it will not pay off for Ankara in the long run. If Turkey does not revive the domestic reform process and does not do what is needed to become more democratic, it will never achieve EU membership. If reforms do not proceed, the accession process will simply come to a halt. Reforms are the fuel that keeps the enlargement engine running. For now, the Turkish ruling party has been able to initiate enough reforms to keep the process going, but the party has completed only those reforms that more clearly serve the interests of its own constituencies. This situation will not be tenable for long. Even EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe that recognize the costs and

difficulties of democratization will not accept an eternal Turkish political transition.

The second message implicitly contained in the Spanish, Italian and Greek positions on Turkey's EU accession, is that Turkey's EU credentials will seriously weaken, or simply fade, if there are further signs of a shift from cooperation and engagement to competition—or even anti-Western balancing—in Turkey's approach to foreign relations. Already, Turkish-U.S. relations are suffering from recent developments in Turkey's policies towards Iran and Israel.[41] Europeans have also complained that the 'zero problems' approach has been selectively applied by Turkey in recent months to the disadvantage of European interests and allies. Turkey must remember that both Iran and the European Union are important neighbors. A Turkish policy of appeasement towards Iran and the East will not only be met with opposition in the West, it will also lead European capitals to reconsider Turkey's relationship with the European Union and Turkey's very place in Europe.

The third and related message is as much about Europe as it is about Turkey. If current Western concerns about Turkey are real, then the best way for the European Union to deal with them is to make the EU work as it worked in the past for other countries that are now functioning democracies and have fully embraced Western principles and practices. A self-restrained European Union that forgoes its power of control and attraction makes for a weaker Europe. Europe's borders will become less secure if a more assertive and less democratic Turkey emerges as a potential competitor on the EU's periphery. By the same token, the European Union will grow in influence if it takes advantage of Turkey and uses it as a springboard to advance European interests in regions such as the Middle East, where the European Union has often found it difficult to make an impact.

The past several years have seen a lively debate on the future of the European Union, and whether its standing has been augmented or weakened by historical achievements such as the adoption of a common currency and recent rounds of enlargement. While reflecting on what can be gained from the European Union and on ways to overcome present difficulties, EU countries and their leaders should keep in mind the fact that what has really made Europe secure and strong in its post-World War II history is the willingness to overcome past divisions. It is not the temptation of European states to 'go national' again, nor the creation of new divisions and walls against the outside. France and Germany enjoy the security and prosperity that they have today not because they tried to re-assert their national power after the war, but because their leaders accepted the verdict of history and embraced the view that the unification and expansion of the European Union could rule out instability resulting from competition, and also collectively restore individual national influence. Of course, they also embraced this view as much from their own free will as they did under U.S. leadership.

U.S. Influence on Turkish-EU Relations

This helps introduce a last point in the discussion—the role of the United States.[42] The United States has long advocated Turkey's membership in the European Union, but its advocacy campaign has not always been effective.[43] The case can be made that the United States achieved major progress toward this goal in 1999, when Turkey was granted candidate status after an intense campaign by the Clinton administration. However, it is highly questionable if U.S. lobbying has had any success since the opening of accession negotiations in 2005. With the start of negotiations, Turkish-EU relations became part of internal European Union business rather than a foreign policy issue in the strictest sense. Consequently, the emphasis the United States has traditionally placed on the strategic value of EU enlargement to Turkey has become reductive for Europeans, who have focused on other thorny issues, such as absorption capacity, domestic reform in Turkey, trade, immigration, etc.

A second explanation, however, has less to do with the United States's continued emphasis on the strategic dimension of EU enlargement to Turkey, but with the way Washington has framed and made this "strategic argument." Not all Europeans were happy with the traditional U.S. Atlanticist position, which argued that Turkey deserved ""a seat in the European Union on the grounds that Ankara has been a loyal NATO ally since the early 1950s. In several European capitals, including Paris, this and similar arguments were the major cause of the 'Trojan horse' syndrome—the fear that Turkey would behave primarily as friend of America rather than as a member of Europe, not unlike the United Kingdom once it entered the European Union. In the light of present uncertainties in Turkey's relationship with the United States and the West, this argument is not only of highly dubious effectiveness, but also hard to make.[44]

Another recurrent theme in U.S. discourse is Turkey as a bridge and model for the Muslim world. Europeans tend to agree with this idea, but they also fear that the bridge might instead become a door for negative tendencies to enter and spread across Europe.[45] The limits of this argument have also been increasingly exposed by recent developments. Continuously emphasizing Turkey's connection with Muslims in neighboring countries, given the present circumstances of growing mistrust, can easily backfire. It could lead already skeptical and prejudiced Europeans to conclude that Turkey is indeed part of a different area of the world, and that Turkey does not really belong in Europe and should not be given a seat in the European Union.

A stronger, timelier and possibly more effective argument for the United States to use seems to be the more classical argument about European integration—that the European Union provides an anchor of stability for countries at different stages of political development and with otherwise potentially problematic separate national trajectories. Insisting on these elements would mean underlining the specific advantages for Europe—in terms of ensuring security and a stronger standing for the European Union—derived from the process of EU enlargement to Turkey. This would also have the advantage of more firmly linking U.S. support to Turkey's EU integration to proven

achievements in the field of democratization—a process that the United States has tended to follow with less attention and participation than its European counterparts. Finally, this argument could help focus the attention of U.S. politicians more on Turkey's domestic and international policies, and less on Cold War legacies or historical controversies such as the one over the Armenian genocide issue.[46]

The United States could work more actively with Turkey's supporters in Europe, finding natural allies in Southern European countries, other traditional pro-enlargement EU members, and any EU country seriously concerned about the future of European stability and peace. U.S. campaigning would not be aimed at countering French and German positions, nor at isolating France and Germany within the European Union, but at strengthening Europe. Whenever possible, the United States should avoid unnecessary or counterproductive publicity. U.S. public remarks about Turkey-EU relations have backfired several times and in the future might resonate even more negatively in European capitals if Turkish-Western relations continue to become more difficult.[47]

In other words, the United States should not dictate what European capitals do, nor should it behave as if it were itself a member of the European Union. The United States should instead help all EU member states recognize, or simply re-appreciate, the fact that it is in Europe's own interest to keep investing in EU integration as an instrument for lasting security and influence. This is the role America has most successfully played in transatlantic relations over the past seventy years.

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