

## **The Limits of “Europeanization”**

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ATHENS—In 2006, relations between Turkey and Europe became increasingly complex, non-linear, and volatile. In December, the European Commission decided to “freeze” negotiations on Turkey’s accession to the European Union. This move was justified on the basis of Ankara’s refusal to open its ports and airports to vessels and airliners from Cyprus.

The decision was not unexpected. The European Union Progress Report released a month earlier had been highly critical of Turkey on practically all matters dealing with accession negotiations. According to the report, Turkey failed to abide by its 2004 commitment to open its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot vessels, and has made no progress in normalizing its relations with the island. The report also recommends that Turkey reform its penal code, especially article 301, which has allowed several court cases against writers and journalists on the grounds of “insulting Turkishness,” and to permit greater freedom of speech. Finally, the report urges Turkey to offer full protections to its religious minorities and to end the military’s involvement in civil society.

Not surprisingly, there is now a chill in the air. Although officially, Ankara remains committed to its European accession bid, it is showing signs of growing irritation over Europe’s persistent doubts concerning the desirability of its integration. Part and parcel of this new turbulence is the fact that Turkey is undergoing a complex sociological evolution, in which modernity and pro-European trends merge with the return of Islam as a socio-political force—and with a resilient nationalism that makes it difficult for Ankara to deal with Brussels’ requests. Keeping in mind that in 2007 both presidential and parliamentary elections will take place in Turkey, it is hard to expect any progress.

As a result, the initial euphoria after the EU’s commencement of accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005 has been replaced by great skepticism in many European capitals, including Athens. Although Turkey is just entering its second year of negotiations with the EU, the record so far is not promising at all. Turkey appears to be unwilling to fulfill its obligations towards Cyprus, and there has been no improvement in its bilateral relations with Greece. In this context, Greek politicians are increasingly asking themselves: has their decision to “Europeanize” the Greek-Turkish disputes paid off?

The realization that all is not well on the Turkish front has certainly been a disappointment. In recent years, Greek foreign policy has made a major U-turn, with Athens initiating a policy of rapprochement with its historic adversary. Since the EU Summit in Helsinki in December 1999, Greece has acquiesced to Europe’s granting of candidate status to Turkey, and endorsed the opening of accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU. The rationale behind this decision was clear; if Turkey became engaged in the European integration



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process, this would trigger gradual stabilization and democratization, making Ankara more flexible and less likely to use military force.

So far, the rapprochement has focused on “soft” issues, such as the avoidance of double taxation, bilateral commercial agreements, confidence-building measures and cultural exchanges, eschewing more complex topics (i.e., the delimitation of the continental shelf zone in the international parts of the Aegean). But Ankara’s reluctance to adjust to European norms is evident in a lack of progress even in matters like Christian minority rights, the acknowledgment of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch. This has been something of a shock for Athens, which expected that the prospect of EU accession would make Ankara more flexible—and to see gestures of goodwill in response to Greece’s lifting of its objections to Turkey’s EU candidacy. Aggravating the situation, the Turkish Parliament’s 1995 decision that an extension by Greece of its territorial waters to twelve nautical miles would constitute a *casus belli* is still in effect, despite the alleged improvements in Greek-Turkish relations.

This is not to suggest that the “Europeanization” of Greece’s foreign policy has been a mistake, or that Athens should stop supporting Turkey’s EU membership. But it serves as a reminder that it is too risky to put all of one’s eggs in a single basket. Today, Athens seems to have invested too much in Brussels, at the expense of an alternative plan should EU-Turkish negotiations fail.

Simply put, relying solely on the EU to force Turkey to change its foreign policy towards Greece is simply unrealistic. There are certain things that Brussels is willing and obliged to do. But ultimately, it is up to Greece and Turkey to solve their problems themselves. And if Greece really intends to alter the status quo, a more active policy is needed. Athens needs a parallel approach that encourages Ankara’s goal of European accession while simultaneously planning for the possibility that it will fail. Such an approach should focus more on long-standing disputes in lieu of secondary issues like trade, environment and tourism. Only then will Athens really be able to test the effect that European norms of behavior will have on the Turkish elite.

