

Recent history

The Republic of Turkey was formed from remnants of the old Ottoman Empire after the War of Turkish Independence (1919-1923). Its first president was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who shaped a secular republic from the formerly Islamic nation. Turkey underwent several coups in the latter half of the twentieth century, which left the army with a controlling influence in many civilian institutions, including higher education and the media. This control has been surrendered in order to meet EU membership standards.

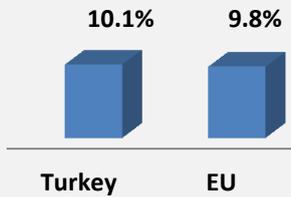
Turkey was an important western ally during the Cold War. It joined the Council of Europe in 1949 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1952. In 1963, the Ankara Agreement of Association was signed as a step towards creating a customs union between Turkey and the European Community. Turkey applied to join the European Community in 1987, but its application was delayed because of the reforms taking place under the Single European Act (1986). In 1999 and 2002, the European Council made statements supporting eventual Turkish membership once the country fulfills all of the demands of the **Copenhagen Criteria**. Membership negotiations officially began in 2005, but progress has been slow.

Issues concerning Turkey's EU membership

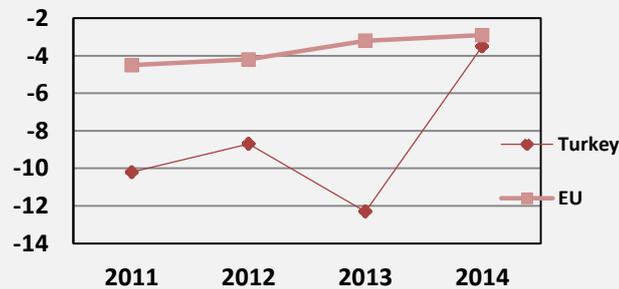
Turkey is the largest of the present candidate countries seeking to join the European Union and its candidacy is the most hotly debated. Key issues for Turkey's EU membership negotiations include:

- ◆ **Economy:** The large and rapidly developing Turkish economy is mainly based on agriculture, which employs a quarter of its workers. There are concerns within the EU that allowing Turkey to join would carry excessive economic costs. However, reforms within Turkey – though incomplete – have brought them very close to the **Copenhagen Criteria** in several ways including establishing a stable economy, lower interest rates and falling inflation.
- ◆ **Human rights:** Despite judicial reforms and a restriction of military influence on civilian life, human rights violations abound since the mildly Islamist Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has dealt ruthlessly with civil dissent – protests have been knocked down violently and various laws now severely restrict press freedom by governmental censorship over websites and other media.
- ◆ **Population:** With its approximately 78 million inhabitants, Turkey's large population would considerably change the balance of power in EU institutions. It would have more MEPs than any other EU member state except Germany. Its population is even expected to surpass the German population by 2020.
- ◆ **Geopolitics:** Opponents of Turkish EU membership have argued that merely 3% of Turkey's landmass lies within continental Europe – the rest lies in southwest Asia. However, proponents of Turkey's membership argue that its geographic location is a major advantage considering its political, cultural and historic ties with regions rich in natural resources such as the Middle East, the Caspian Sea region and Central Asia. Turkey is also a key regional power and the second largest military force of NATO after the United States. For these reasons, having Turkey as a member state could enhance the EU's position as a global player.
- ◆ **Religion:** Religious and cultural differences between Turkey and current EU member states raise fundamental questions about the nature of the EU. Supporters of Turkish membership of the EU feel that it could prove Islamic society is compatible with the West. For opponents, the fact that 99% of the Turkish population is Muslim is a reason for questioning whether Turkey could ever truly be considered 'European'.
- ◆ **Cyprus dispute:** A major impediment for Turkey to join the EU is its ongoing conflict with Greece about Cyprus. The island has been divided since 1983 in the internationally recognised Greek Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Following various failed attempts, reunification talks were renewed in early 2014 and boosted in June 2015, when the moderate Mustafa Akinci (Communal Democracy Party) was elected as President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Although Turkey does not give full diplomatic recognition to the Greek part of Cyprus, it now does recognise Cyprus as an EU member.

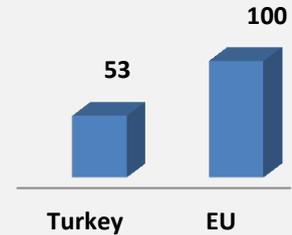
Unemployment rate (2015)



Public budget deficit/surplus



GDP per capita in PPS (2013)



Facts and figures

- ❖ Turkey's national debt fell from 91% of GDP in 2001 to 64% in 2005 and 46.3% in 2009, but rose slightly to 48.1% in 2010. The Copenhagen Criterion sets a maximum of 60%
- ❖ The total Turkish population is greater than that of all ten Eastern European member states that joined the EU in 2004

Turkey: key facts



- ❖ **Capital** Ankara
- ❖ **Population** 78 million (2014)
- ❖ **Official language** Turkish
- ❖ **Currency** Turkish lira (TRY)
- ❖ **Schengen Area member** No
- ❖ **EU membership status** Official candidate since 1999

"Turkey has always been a European country... it's not about religion and religious differences, it's about values."

Jack Straw, former British Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary

"In my opinion, it [Turkish EU membership] would be the end of Europe."

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, former French President

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Copenhagen Criteria:** standards that must be met before a country can join the EU, as set down at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993.
- ❖ **PPS:** GDP per head is expressed in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) to eliminate the differences in price levels between countries allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries

Links

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