

## **European Union Membership Process Of Turkey; Its Pros And Cons For Turkey**

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### **Abstract**

The membership process of Turkey has been carried out since 1959 when Turkey first applied to join what was then called the European Economic Community. This process had profound influence on Turkey in many fields such as economy, social life, international policy, education etc.

The first agreement signed between Turkey and European Union was “Ankara Agreement” which took place in 12 September 1963. This agreement envisaged establishment of customs union, which is aimed at integration of Turkey and European Economic Community in three main phases. Following this agreement additional protocols were signed. The year 1987 was another turning point for the process that Turkey applied for full membership on this date. Besides the developments in 1987, in 2004 Turkey realized an important step on the way to becoming a full member. In 2004 European Union Member States decided that negotiations with Turkey could be initiated. The negotiations are still carried out. All of the agreements and protocols in the process required Turkey perform new policies which affect the society in many fields.

The question of how this process has affected Turkey, which is asked by many, is still one of the most questioned issues of Turkey. It is obvious that 53 years-old process has had a lot of advantages and disadvantages for Turkey. To see the main pros and cons clearly, the issue must be analyzed under three main subtitles; economy, social life and policy.

**Keywords:** EU, Turkey, Membership Process, Customs Union, Ankara Agreement.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The relations between Turkish people and the European civilization have a deep and long history. Remarkable relations date back till the Seljuk Empire times then it continues with the Ottomans. The Ottoman Empire was recognized as a European state with the Declaration of Paris in 1856 (Eldem, 2005). After Ottoman Empire’s collapse, Turkish Republic was founded and its fundamental aim was to reach modern civilizations level.

The way of reaching modern civilizations level was to internalize developments experienced in the west without destroying our own values. Till the end of 1950s, the relations ran at an idle, however 1959 was a landmark in view of Turkey's relationships with Europe. In this year the Turkish government applied to European Community to be an associate member.

The second important date is 1963. The Turkish government signed the Ankara Agreement with the EEC. It was the first financial protocol between the community and Turkey (Euractive 2004) and constituted legal foundations of the membership process. After Ankara Agreement, another important component in the relations was The Additional Protocol of 13 November 1970 which meant Turkey would be a part of customs union step by step. After the long period of negotiations, protocols and different obstacles which took nearly thirty years, in 1995 Customs Union Agreement was signed. With this agreement, Turkey became a full member of the Customs Union in 1 January 1996 and almost 60 per cent of Turkey's trade is now with European states.

1999 Helsinki Summit followed Customs Union Agreement and Turkey became a candidate country. After Helsinki Summit, another important date was October 2004 when the Commission presented the 2004 regular report on Turkey's progress towards accession and recommended the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey in this report (Prime Ministry Undersecretariat of Customs 2007). In October 2005 negotiations started and membership process took a new route.

As seen above, Turkey has a very long membership process. The main aim of this long and grueling period was to reach modern civilizations, therefore what must be asked at this point is what are the pros and cons of this membership process for Turkey. In this study this question will be examined.

## **2. Advantages of the Membership Process**

The long membership process has had profound affects on Turkey in many areas. Main advantages of the process can be classified under these subtitles;

### **2.1. Political Framework**

In political area, the membership process has gained Turkey many important aspects. Turkey is a geographically strategic country which has strong bounds with Asian Turkish Countries, Muslim World and Balkan Countries. If Turkey can carry out effective policies toward these areas, it can be one of the key states in the union and increase its effectiveness. Using her cultural, historical and religious ties, Turkey can be an important bridge between the east and west, that is because Turkey is one of the unique countries that have such strong ties with both the east and the west, which makes Turkey an important player.

## **2.2. Democracy, Social Standards and Human Rights Framework**

The process has contributed enormously to the development of democracy understanding in Turkey. Turkey has been exposed to many military coups and as a result there existed a morbid understanding that army have right to interfere with the government. This means army is the power above all foundations, which conflicts with the democracy notion. During the process positive steps have been taken to eliminate this misunderstanding and democracy has been strengthened through the laws and regulations passed during the process. Actually the membership process has been used as an instrument to convince the obsolete pro-militarists and achieve the real democracy.

During the membership process, human rights and judicial reforms have been one of the most important issues that should be dealt with neatly. The civil, political, social and economic rights of humans are likely the main concerns of the union. Some reforms aiming at enriching human rights, judicial organization and eliminating strict restrictions have been dictated by European Union as a part of membership conditions and these reforms have had positive effects in terms of human rights and social standards. Many practices such as capital punishments, torture, child labor, restrictions on freedoms, poor working conditions, poor social security etc., which are not suitable for a modern country, have been amended or entirely abolished in accordance with European Union standards.

## **2.3. Economic Framework**

When examined the economic benefits of the membership process, it is clearly seen that Customs Union is the key term in this field. With Customs Union Agreement Turkey has taken an important step in view of her technical regulations in economic fields. To be able to exist in European markets and compete with other states, Turkey needed production standards. These high standards and regulations were provided with Turkey by European Union as parts of the membership process. Customer satisfaction, food security and product quality are main targets of the regulations and undoubtedly these regulations increased quality and standards in Turkey.

European Union means a new market for Turkey. European Union lacks of many products which are abundant in Turkey. If Turkey can achieve quality and high technical standards, she can make huge profits from the new market. With the process many regulations about export and import were made flexible and trade among Europe countries became much easier. This increased Turkey's economic importance in the region as well.

Turkey's location resembling a bridge between Asia and Europe became much more important with the membership process. With Turkey which is dependable partner state, European Union has broaden its economic affairs to Middle East and Asian states. As a result, Turkey's importance and effectiveness got bigger.

## **2.4. Cultural Framework**

Cultural framework is one of the most controversial issues in the membership process. Some spheres argue that cultural alienation occurs as a result of the reforms, developments and alterations experienced during the process, while others argue the society has interaction with other cultures which results in positive feedbacks.

Being aware of different cultures and taking good samples from these cultures may be one of the most significant outcomes of the process. During the process, many reforms have been realized in all spheres, a lot of Turkish citizens had chance to visit different countries of the union, many university students have benefited from different exchange programs and undoubtedly all of these have contributed to cultural structure of Turkey. For example, many university students had a chance to travel different countries of the union and these experiences opened up new vistas for them.

Apart from social interaction, there are cultural outcomes stemming from economical, social and political developments. Especially social reforms affected Turkey's cultural structure more than the others. Many social reforms bettering life conditions have been passed and cultural aspects started to alter as a result. For example, many restrictions on freedoms have been abolished and the citizens added freedom understanding to their cultural heritage. Another good example is that effect of military foundations on fields of politics has been eliminated and democracy understanding has been internalized as a part of culture.

## **3. Disadvantages of the Membership Process**

In spite of the advantages mentioned above, there are many disadvantages experienced and foreseen. The main issues centre on fear of cultural assimilation, interference to domestic policy and possible compatibility problems.

### **3.1. Possible Compatibility Issues**

There are two main roots of a culture; the first one is religion and the other one is national history. Nearly all of the European Union countries come from the same religious roots and they have a common historical background. On the other hand, the Christian Europeans put a distance on every different social, religious and ethnic structures and cultures for ages. They excluded and tried to destroy the different cultures and these thoughts remained not only in politician's minds but also remained in regular European citizen's mind (Hatipoğlu 2004). At this point there is a strong controversy that Turkey has a different religious and historical background. If the union is a Christian Union as implied above, does Turkey have a place in the union? Even if she finds a place, can she have adaptation? These are the questions which are asked and examined by both sides.

### **3.2. Fear of Cultural Assimilation**

Each culture has its own unique values and aspects. In the process many values and aspects of Turkish Culture has degenerated as a result of dominant culture of the union which stems from economic, social, political and cultural strength of European Union. Many citizens of Turkey are afraid of cultural assimilations and the signs of cultural assimilations observed till now have supported their concerns.

### **3.3. Interference with Domestic Policies**

Each state has unique laws, foundations, regimes, state structures... As a result, some laws necessary for a country can be found exaggerated or insufficient by another country. Similar conditions can be seen in the membership process. Many regulations and laws had to be abolished, changed or passed in accordance with European Union's requirements. This case raised the questions in minds whether European Union interferes with Turkey's domestic policies. Does European Union have right to force Turkey to change any law about her own domestic policy? This is one of the biggest question marks in minds.

Another worry is that the future of the EU is not certain. It is a big question whether EU is going to be a union of states or a federal state or something else. But it is certain that the EU is moving towards to a federation. Modern state has the right to control its domestic affairs and can decide for its actions.(Tulgar 2009) If European Unions is moving towards federation, in the future will Turkey be able to decide for her own actions or will Turkey control her own domestic affairs herself? Is Turkey's sovereignty restricted?

## **4. Conclusion**

The membership process of Turkey has been carried out since 1959 when Turkey first applied to join what was then called the European Economic Community. This process had profound influence on Turkey in many fields such as economy, social life, international policy, education etc. The question of how this process has affected Turkey, which is asked by many, is still one of the most questioned issues of Turkey. It is obvious that 53 years-old process has had a lot of advantages and disadvantages for Turkey. In this paper, main advantages and disadvantages of the process are mentioned and examined under various subtitles.

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