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WHY A PRO-WESTERN TURKEY IS A U.S. POLICY PRIORITY

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Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), is one of America's most important allies. Ensuring that this populous, predominantly Muslim country remains a pro-Western secular democracy broadly supportive of U.S. policy should be a top-tier national security interest. That goal, however, is threatened by the resistance of some members of the European Union (EU) to giving Turkey a firm date for its near-term accession.

Turkey has been demanding a firm date for accession talks by 2003, and America has strongly supported Turkey's aspirations. The EU, however, at its December 12–13 meeting in Copenhagen, failed to embrace a future that includes Ankara in the near term. Washington therefore should implement a diplomatic, economic, and military assistance contingency plan that shores up U.S. relations with its ally and strengthens its contributions to the war on terrorism.

On Course for Crisis. Turkey's past aspirations to EU membership have met with little success, but Ankara has made substantial efforts to address EU concerns, such as granting language rights to the Kurdish minority in 2002 and abolishing its death penalty. Germany and France have tentatively agreed to begin concrete negotiations for Turkey's accession provided Turkey continues to reform its political and human rights policies, as judged by

EU member states in December 2004. This is unacceptable to Ankara.

One of the reasons Turkey resents the proposed delay is a popular perception that the EU would never welcome a Muslim Turkey. When asked recently whether he supported Turkey's accession, for example, former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing replied that it has "a different culture, a different approach.... It is not a European country.... In my opinion, [Turkish membership] would be the end of the European Union." This resentment has intensified due to the imminent accession of the Greek Cypriot-controlled half of the Republic of Cyprus—but not the half controlled by the Turkish Cypriots. Turkey sees that as a snub and potential threat to the continued political and economic viability of Turkish Cyprus.

The Cause of Accession. Ankara has long seen itself as a European country. EU membership would confirm Turkey's evolution as a secular, modern,

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Western-style democratic state, validating the efforts of the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. EU membership also offers many economic and political benefits, including influence over policy in the world's largest economic bloc.

Turkey's membership faces many hurdles. Its population of 70 million—which would be second only to Germany's in the EU—and predominately agrarian economy threaten the EU's budget, particularly in terms of the Common Agricultural Policy and cohesion fund for poorer states. Given demographic trends, Turkey's population would quickly make it the EU's largest voting bloc, draining power from countries like France and Italy that are accustomed to having a major say in EU policy. The ability of any one nation to block Turkish accession lessens the likelihood that the EU will act as rapidly as Turkey desires.

Turkey rightly feels singled out. Every other aspirant to EU membership has been granted an accession date *before* meeting and implementing all of the membership criteria. Indeed, countries invited to join at the Copenhagen meeting have not yet met all of the criteria. For Turkey not to be given a firm date after the reforms it has made suggests the EU may be hesitating over whether it wants Turkey as a member at all. Its failure to consider Turkey's accession more seriously could exacerbate Turkish hostility toward Europe and the West. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the Justice and Development Party that controls Turkey's parliament, expressed this concern on a recent trip to EU capitals: "Turkey does not feel that the EU is a Christian club, but if a date is not given, Turks might start to believe this."

The U.S. Strategy. European resistance to Turkish accession has important implications for U.S. national security interests. If Ankara believes that its case for accession is not being judged on its merits, it could decide to demonstrate just how important Turkey is in the post-Cold War era: for example, by failing to support a peace settlement in Cyprus or by obstructing the EU from using NATO assets; ending efforts at rapprochement with

Greece; bolstering relations with repressive regimes in Syria, Libya, or Iran; or failing to support U.S. efforts to remove Saddam Hussein.

In addition to pressuring the EU, Washington should encourage Ankara to set its own deadline for receiving a firm near-term accession date. Should the EU process founder, Washington should be prepared to demonstrate its commitment by offering Turkey closer ties to the West. Specifically, it should:

- **Assure** Turkey that America will not support a Kurdish state in a post-Saddam Iraq;
- **Increase** military assistance to Turkey, including arms sales, to equip and prepare it to be an ally in the war on terrorism, and announce its intention to expand military exercises with Turkish armed forces through NATO, bilaterally, and trilaterally with Israel;
- **Partially compensate** Turkey for the economic costs of its activities in Afghanistan and curtailed trade with Iraq; and
- **Offer** a U.S.–Turkish bilateral free trade agreement if Turkey decides to withdraw from the EU Customs Union and join the European Free Trade Area (EFTA).

Conclusion. EU accession negotiations with Ankara have vast implications for the United States, Turkey, the EU, and the world. Turkish membership should not founder on bureaucratic barriers erected by shortsighted or xenophobic elements of the EU. Any course that encourages anti-Western sentiments in Turkey is not in America's best interests. Turkey should not let fundamental decisions about its future be held hostage by EU intransigence. America and Turkey must be prepared to act with or without EU consensus.

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