

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3131  
February 2, 2011

## How the EU's Prevarication Advances the AKP's Agenda in Turkey

*Morgan L. Roach and Sally McNamara*

In 2005, Turkey formally fulfilled the European Union's "Copenhagen Criteria" to achieve official candidate status. However, the EU has not negotiated with Ankara in good faith, and Turkey's membership prospects are badly stalled.

Unfortunately, the EU's contrived negotiating position has provided the AKP with an opportunity to pursue an agenda that better reflects its leaders' foreign policy and ideological preferences and allows Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to use the failing accession process as cover for Ankara's deepening partnerships with regional actors that are hostile to the West.

**AKP Consolidating Power.** In 2002, public support in Turkey for EU accession was at 65 percent. Therefore, supporting EU accession was smart politics for the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which had won election with less than 35 percent of the national vote. It also reassured Turkish elites and their Western partners that the AKP remained committed to Turkey's Euro-Atlantic ties. However, EU member states, led by France and Germany, continue to block the opening of new chapters of the EU's body of law—the *acquis communautaire*—with which Turkey must align itself to be eligible for accession. This has caused widespread belief in Turkey that leading EU members are not serious about full membership for Ankara. As a result, Turkish public backing for EU membership fell to just 47 percent in 2010.

Officially, the AKP remains committed to pursuing membership, not least of all because it has

allowed the AKP to cherry-pick the constitutional reforms that most expand its power.<sup>1</sup> For example, when reforming Turkey's penal code in 2004 in line with the EU accession process, Erdogan attempted to restore a law to criminalize adultery in order to appease the AKP's devoutly Muslim base. A constitutional referendum in September<sup>2</sup> improved privacy rights and introduced new equality laws for women and children, but it also reduced the independence of the judiciary, limited the separation of powers, and weakened the army—Turkey's traditional protector of secularism.

The EU has failed to appreciate the *sui generis* role of the military in protecting Turkish secularism and has called for the establishment of a new Turkish constitution, which will likely strengthen the AKP's grip on power.<sup>3</sup> The AKP has pledged to re-write the Turkish constitution if it wins the elections this June, and it is speculated that the bulk of government power will be placed in the president's office—an office that Erdoğan will then claim for himself.

**"Zero Problems with Neighbors"?** Turkish membership of the EU is unlikely, especially in the near future—a fact that the AKP is well aware of. The fear of mass Turkish migration to Europe and

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3131>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison  
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 • [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the Views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

Turkey's voting weight inside EU institutions underlie opposition to Ankara's accession in the long term. Nevertheless, the EU accession process allows Davutoglu to pursue his "zero problems with neighbors" policy. In his book *Strategic Depth*, Davutoglu maps out Turkey's unique geopolitical role and his strategy for maximizing Ankara's regional influence.<sup>4</sup> To this end, Turkey is ending long-term hostilities with regional partners such as Iran and maximizing its diplomatic engagements. However, as Turkey's relations with Armenia, Cyprus, and Israel demonstrate, it has far from "zero problems" with several of its neighbors.

The AKP has sought to establish its credentials as a regional power broker by adopting the role of mediator. However, its mediation efforts have not always been in the best interests of the transatlantic alliance. In 2010, Ankara partnered with Brazil in trying to broker an unacceptable nuclear fuel swap deal with Iran. Although the deal was ultimately rejected and sanctions were agreed in the U.N. Security Council, Turkey's mediation efforts undermined the international momentum behind the U.S.-led sanctions, and Ankara voted against them. While Turkey's NATO membership and its pursuit of EU membership tie it to the West, some see these links as having weakened.

#### What Turkey and the EU Should Do:

- *Negotiate in good faith.* Both sides should be honest about what they hope to achieve from continuing accession talks. Even after Turkey gained candidate status, the EU is still contriving ways of delaying the membership process. Like-

wise, Ankara should work fairly with its Western partners on substantive issues such as making sure Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons.

- *Pursue tangible opportunities for partnership.* Instead of the onerous Customs Union arrangement, Turkey and the EU should adopt a free trade agreement.
- *Explore membership in the European Defense Agency.* The EU should invite Turkey to join the European Defense Agency—provided that Turkey demonstrates its commitment to stopping Tehran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

**Turkey and the EU.** In a sign of growing confidence, Ankara's chief EU negotiator, Egeman Bagis, warned Brussels that the EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs Europe.<sup>5</sup> The EU's fractured policy toward Turkish membership has created apathy among the Turkish population and a loss of trust in Ankara. The EU should commit to conducting transparent negotiations.

President Obama should also remind Turkish leaders that there are responsibilities as well as benefits to its NATO membership. The level of trust that the world invests in Turkey as a NATO member and EU candidate depends on Turkey's willingness to be an honest partner.

—Morgan L. Roach is a Research Assistant and Sally McNamara is Senior Policy Analyst in European Affairs in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.

1. Mahir Zeynalov, "Brand New Constitution a Must for Turkey's EU Membership," *Today's Zaman*, September 19, 2010, at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-222047-102-brand-new-constitution-a-must-for-turkeys-eu-membership.html> (January 20, 2011).
2. See Ariel Cohen, "Turkey's Referendum: A Looming Challenge to U.S. Interests?" Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 3016, September 17, 2010, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/09/turkeys-referendum-a-looming-challenge-to-us-interests> (January 18, 2011).
3. European Union Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges," November 9, 2010, p. 18.
4. Sally McNamara, Ariel Cohen, and James Phillips, "Countering Turkey's Strategic Drift," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2442, July 26, 2010, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/07/countering-turkey-s-strategic-drift> (January 18, 2011).
5. Betül Akkaya Demirba, "EU Needs Turkey More Than Turkey Needs It," *Today's Zaman*, January 7, 2011, at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-231759-eu-nee> (January 7, 2011).